

7

6

may/june 1996

modern rock on cue

**the artist
formerly
known as**

eric **Champion**

peace
this train
supertones
christafari
driver eight
seven day jesus
gospel gangstas

lost dogs
poor old lu



Alarma Records

HOTEL

Every Day Life Poor Old Lu a few loose screws

once you check in... you'll never want to leave

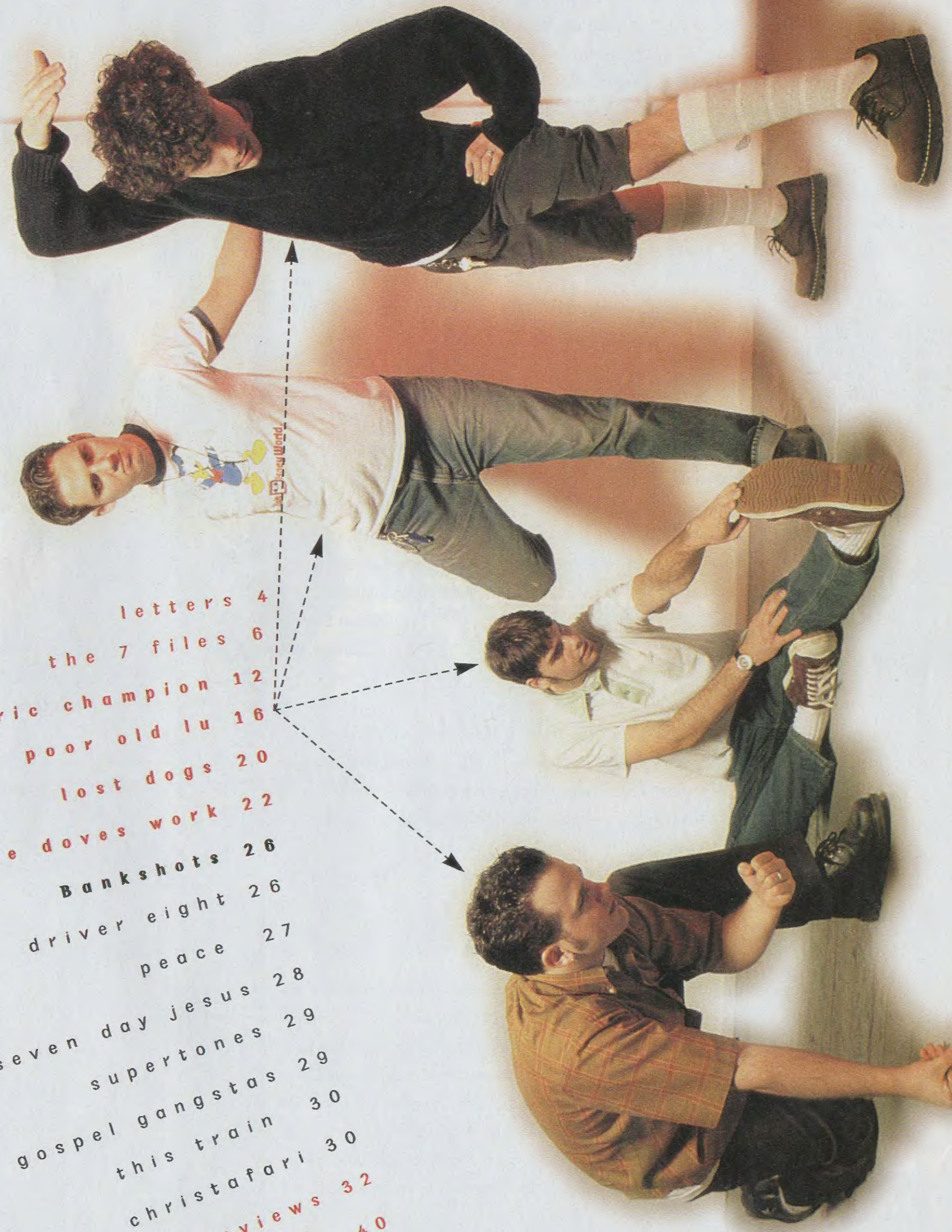


ix

MAY / JUNE 1996
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Peter King was talking about why MTV doesn't play Christian videos ... because they're "the most atrocious, horrible music you ever heard." I guess that must be why Dakota Motor Company's videos are not seen on MTV.

Ray Eighmy
East Bethany, NY 14054

Your publication is one of the best I've read. I think the big reason it's becoming so successful is because it is brutally honest. Your interview with Peter King is a perfect example of this honesty. You printed exactly what he said. No attempt was made to gloss the truth over. I think too often in the world of Christian music, magazines are afraid to point out the faults in the music being produced. Just because we are Christians doesn't necessarily mean we have to settle for something less than excellent. If a Christian artist releases a recording that is poor, then it is up to the reviewers in magazines such as 7ball to point out the record's faults. I think you guys are taking up this challenge. I just wanted to say thanks.

Timothy J. Tracey
Grove City, PA

As a youth pastor whom is very much into the alternative scene that Christians are creating, it is a breath of fresh air—after holding it for so long—to see in 7ball a quality Christian music publication that is worth sharing with the "washed and unwashed" alike. It is worth the wait to see someone staring into the abyss that separates us from them, attempting with such style to make that canyon less threatening and wide, little by little, month by month. It is not only by the blood of the Lamb that we'll succeed, but by the word of our testimony. Thanks, 7ball, for testifying—in a relevant way—to our generation.

Aaron Blanco
Clinton, MS

I'd like to comment on the review of *The Best of Mortification*. It seems the reviewer was not a fan of theirs! While I'm not particularly drawn to their style of "music" ... I feel a little more objectivity would be appropriate. Thank goodness for all the diverse musical styles—otherwise, life would be extremely boring!

Arlene Marais
Roswell, GA

I have a real problem with all the people who have been writing in about the infamous MxPx article. Although their points are well taken—if you have never been to an MxPx show, then you're not really qualified to discuss their live performance. I just got home from one of their shows, and not only could I understand every word, they also took time to discuss their stance with the crowd. If we were all called to evangelize in the same way, we would miss large segments of society. MxPx are making an effort to reach people who would otherwise have nothing to do with God. They should be commended, not scorned.

Hugh McKinney
Vinemont, AL

7ball reserves the right to edit letters for space and for clarity. Send letters to the editor to Feedback, P.O. Box 24925, Nashville, TN 37202.



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T H E 7 F I L E S

T H E T R U T H I S R I G H T H E R E



SARAH MASEN is just one of the artists you'll hear on **ONE POINT OH: THE RETHINK COLLECTION**, a project that's making history in more ways than one. One, it is the very first project from **CHARLIE PEACOCK'S** new rethink label. Second, it is the only outside project ever to have the packaging designed by **PETER GABRIEL'S** company, **REAL WORLD** (and, for the time being, at least, it's the only outside project Real World will ever do). Third, it is the first release to benefit from the very first partnership between a record company and **AMERICA ONLINE**: *One Point Oh* includes a free installer and 15 free hours with AOL. The project also has an interactive CD-ROM segment, including interviews and a tour of the **ART HOUSE** (every CD from rethink is scheduled to include CD-ROM). In the

end, of course, what matters is the music: *One Point Oh* is a very hip collection of modern pop, drawing from such diverse influences as Brit pop, alternative country, psycho jazz and acid classical. Peacock and Masen both appear on the collection, with one track each from their upcoming albums (Peacock's surprising *strangelanguage* and Masen's label debut both release close to July); the rest of *One Point Oh* gives a platform to several unsigned but very worthy (and, for some, "very quirky") adult alternative artists. So, *One Point Oh* isn't just good history—it's just plain good, too (a hint to those who get into CD-ROM: look for the very special surprise guest during the closing credits).

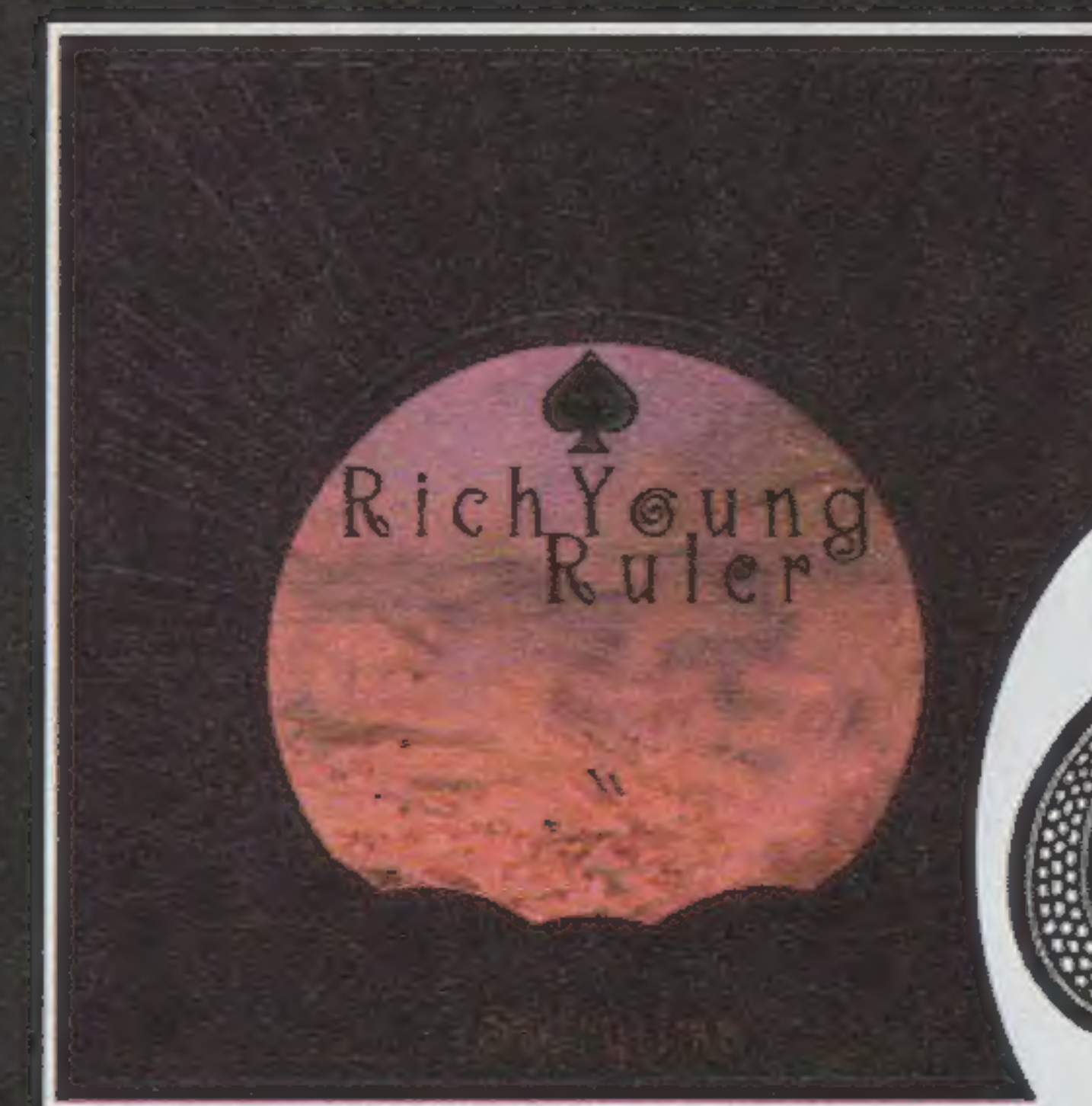
BLACK EYED SCEVA ("See-va" ... the "c" is silent) will release a new EP this summer, with a couple of new songs, some live tracks, and a cover of the **POLICE** classic "Invisible Sun." If you get a chance to see them on the road with **POOR OLD LU**, don't miss their brand of rootsy college rock. You'll also be helping a good cause—proceeds from the tour go toward building the **FIVE MINUTE WALK HOUSE** in Tijuana, Mexico, where as many as 100 needy children will be fed and clothed daily.



HOKUS PICK. DC TALK. 'nuff said.

The Inner City Church in Knoxville, Tenn., where **REGGIE WHITE** is associate pastor, recently burned down. Since the Green Bay Packer also has a record company, White has released a single to raise money to

Man oh man oh man is this **PETRA TRIBUTE** cool—**NEVER SAY DINOSAUR** makes old things new again, with very cool turns from **SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER**, **GALACTIC COWBOYS**, **JARS OF CLAY**, **MXPX** and the unlikely team of **KEVIN SMITH** with **PASSAFIST**. Of special note is the track from **THE STAND**, where they sing the words of "Pied Piper" to, essentially, the theme from *Friends* (are they making a statement about the hypnotic power of television?). It's great to hear these songs from my junior high days performed with such chic and gusto by bands that are relevant to today's music scene. Look for *Never Say Dinosaur* in June.



also...
available soon
from brainstorm:
the prayer chain
"antarctica"
and
the throe's

rebuild the church. "Doggie's in the House" features rapper **MIKE-E** with **White**, and **YWFC** appears on the B-side. Look for the single in your favorite Christian bookstore. If you want to send a donation directly to help rebuild the church, send it to Big Doggie Records, 2830 Old Smith Springs Road, Nashville, TN 37217.

By the time you read this the **SWIRLING EDDIES** may have returned with one of their most unusual projects yet—an album with remakes of classic Christian songs. There's also the possibility of a tour.



Gambling, of course, is wrong.

LOVE COMA came through the Nashville area recently to play at the **JAMMIN' JAVA**. The mostly acoustic set included songs from their moody rock n' roll delight, *Language of Fools*, as well as some new songs they've been working on. The highlight of the evening, however, came during the brief intermission, when lead singer **CHRIS TAYLOR** auctioned off some of his paintings.

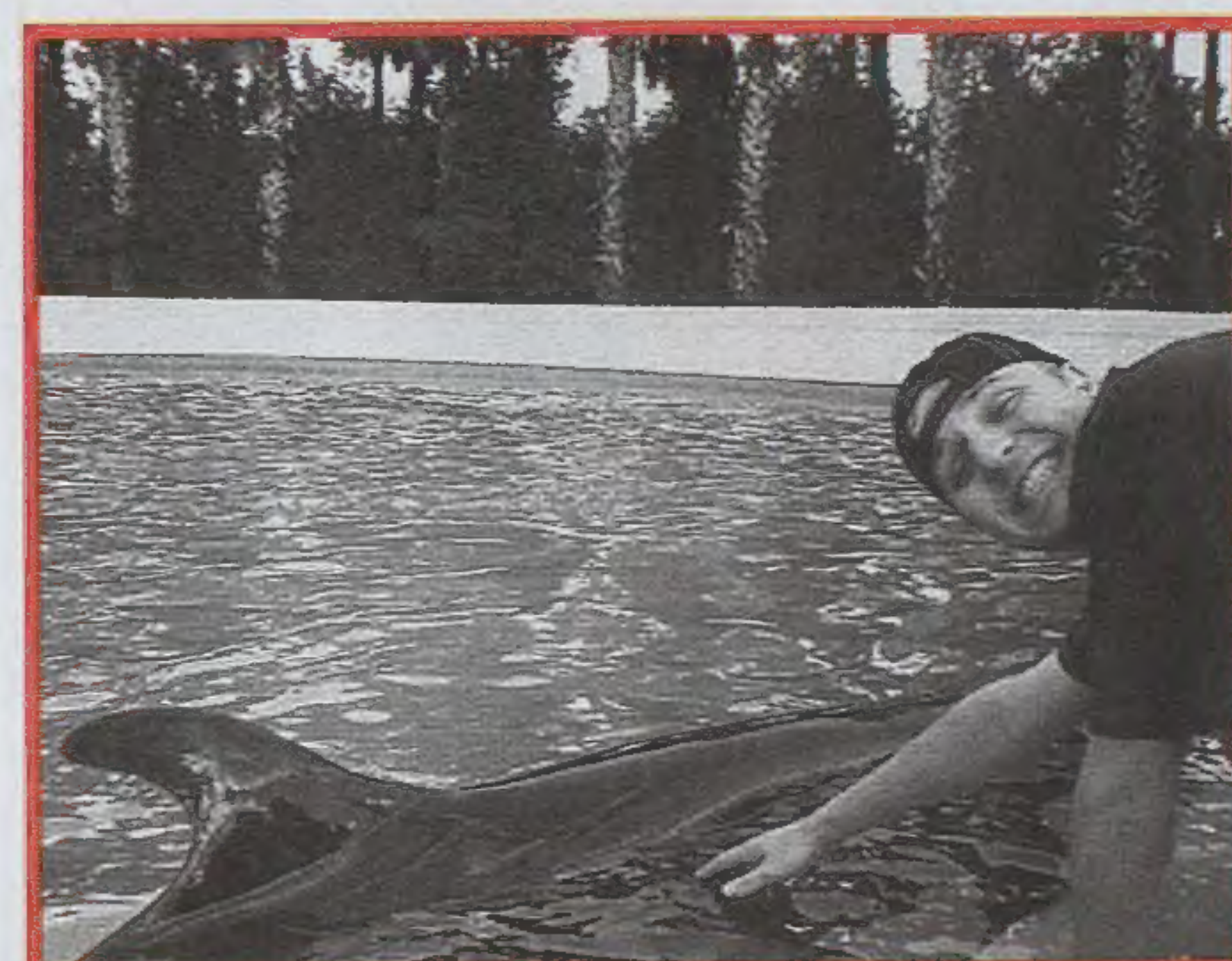
THE OGGZ (ORIGINAL GOSPEL GANGSTAS), together with **KOKF 91FM** in Oklahoma City, raised more than \$11,000 worth of donations and 1,000 volunteers in an effort to alleviate the plight of Jackson Middle School, Oklahoma City's poorest school. What happened is **OGGZ MR. SOLO** and **CHILLE CHILL** "held up" the radio station for more than two hours, their list of on-air demands including donations of money and specific supplies needed by the school. Actual police officers donated their time to "negotiate" the terms of the station's release.

PLANKEYE and **DRIVER EIGHT** are hitting 49 cities together this summer. Plankeye is then possibly opening for a high-profile (and top secret) tour this fall. Stay tuned.

THE CMC'S are traveling to New Zealand mid-summer to help with the area's growing gang problems. The Auckland Police Department contacted the rappers to book them for performances at youth centers, prisons, and high schools. The Auckland P.D. is completely funding this effort.

SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER drummer **DALE BAKER** discovered a beautiful mess when he looked out the window of his third-story apartment last February: The neighbor's indoor cat Tisha was caught in a tree between the two houses. Using the landlady's extension ladder, roommate (and band songwriter/guitarist) **MATT SLOCUM** climbed more than three stories into the tree with band manager/producer **ARMAND JOHN PETRI** close behind. On the ground, with a blanket to catch the cat, were

Baker, **LEIGH BINGHAM** and friends. Slocum and Bingham received some scratches from the fearful Tisha, but all parties are in good health. Baker and Slocum recently moved from Dallas and New Braunfels, Texas to their new apartment in Music City.



To celebrate the last day of their tour, **IAN, STEVE TAYLOR & co.** joined animal trainer **KIM ASHDOWN** at **SEA WORLD** of Florida. Here, of course, we see Ian and his new friend, who later remarked, "So long and thanks for all the fish."

Wedding bells! **MATT WIGNALL** of **HAVALINA RAIL CO** recently wed **JUDITA BEDER**, former music director at KNYK in Nyack, NY. **JASON MARTIN** of **STARFLYER 59** has married **JULIE MUSALI** of **THE**

JULIE BAND (and also Havalina Rail Co). **JEREMY MOFFETT**, member of **STAVESACRE** and **THE BLAMED**, will be getting married this fall.

RASPBERRY JAM lead vocalist **DESTINY** will record a solo project this year, with a release scheduled for this fall.

The **7BALL CONCERT SERIES** Thursday nights at **ROCKETTOWN** is becoming a pretty big deal (well, it is to us): If you're in the Nashville area anytime soon, check out: **THE WAITING; LOST DOGS W/DIME STORE PROPHETS; FOLD ZANDURA; HOLY SOLDIER; and JESUS FREAKS**. In June you can see **HAVALINA RAIL CO** or **STAVESACRE (w/ROADSIDE MONUMENT)**. **MXPX** w/the **SUPERTONES** hit the club in August. To keep up with concerts at Rockettown (they have stuff going on all the time), or to get directions, call their concertline at (615) 377-0020.

I'm no world-traveller (I never made it to Paris), but I was in Los Angeles recently. In addition to sharing a plane with country singer **MARTY STUART** and actor **MARTIN SHEEN**, I saw a couple of up-and-coming bands. **RAINY DAYS** is another one of those high-energy pop-punk bands the kids are talking about. What won my heart was their choice for opening number, "Where Everybody Knows Your Name," better known as the theme from **CHEERS**. **FLOWERS FOR JUNE** is a little harder to describe, but think of it as post-hardcore art rock, with loud melody. Both bands are scheduled to have records out early fall.

We want to hear from you—we're looking for the best haiku poetry you can think of to honor 7ball and express how 7ball is a special part of your life. The rules, of course, are pretty simple: It's a three-line poem, with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line and five syllables in the final line. For example:

7ball is good.
I like 7ball a lot.
Subscribe today, punk.

Send us your best work and we'll print our favorite examples in an upcoming issue of 7ball. Send entries to **7BALL HAIKU FEVER**, P.O. Box 24925, Nashville, TN 37202. If haiku isn't the official poetry of alternative rockers, then we don't know what is.

Lately, with the help of SoundScan, MTV, and the ever-growing sales of Christian music, it's become easier to hear your favorite Christian music—Johnny Q. Public is just the latest to reap the benefits, with a special record deal that allows them to work in the mainstream with Elektra, but also lets them stay in the Christian music industry with Gotee.

Guitarist Shawn Turner says Elektra will re-release *Extraordinary* with new packaging in July. "They're planning on releasing 'Body Be' as a single and pushing the video to MTV. After that we'll probably do a video for 'Preacher's Kid' and do that single. I don't know how many singles they'll do, but we'll probably tour for several months and try to get on a big tour, and then after that we'll go in and record the next album."

The new arrangement pushes back plans for a second JQP album until sometime next year.

Gotee Records president Joey Elwood makes it clear, however, that this does not mean JQP is leaving Christian music. "What was so encouraging to us was Elektra came to one of the concerts when Dan [Fritz, JQP vocalist] gave a *serious, serious* invitation and they came out of the show going, 'cool.' We were shocked—we figured they'd run out the door when they saw that. But he said, 'Hey, man, this is what it is, and we dig it.' They just think the music is great, and they're very supportive of where we're coming from, and why we're doing it."

The agreement between the two labels allows Elektra to pursue general market airplay and media while Gotee will continue to be responsible for the Christian market. The end result is that your local rock radio station could be playing stuff you can find in your local Christian bookstore.

"We both have ownership in the band, from a business standpoint," Elwood says. "The band is essentially signed to Elektra directly. Johnny Q. Public is considered a part of the label repertoire and they plan to really support this band."

As the relationship develops, if Elektra breaks JQP they'll be bringing more attention to Christian music—and to the Gospel.

"That's kind of why we wanted to start Gotee. We just wanted to make music that anybody could listen to, but that very blatantly talks about Jesus. If the quality of the music is there—and I think Johnny Q is showing this—then the

message doesn't matter; I think people listen to music first, they dig it, and then they get into the lyrics. We started this label to make music that both evangelizes and feeds the church. We want to play in front of Christians. We are Christians. We are not embarrassed by that at all. But we also want to play for people that aren't Christians, and we want music that will make them move."

JQP came to the attention of Elektra because of their appearances on MTV's *120 Minutes*, a feat Elwood says was unexpected: No one had pushed for the vidplay of "Body Be," they just sent the video.

"MTV called us. *120 Minutes* said they really liked it, but since there wasn't any radio action, they said they could play it once. They ended up playing it twice."

That wasn't the end of it: MTV also used the song on the show *Singled Out*, and played the song during a Cindy Crawford interview. "I think they misinterpreted what the song 'Body Be' means," Elwood laughs, "but God bless 'em."

The video "Body Be" was also one of five available on the *120 Minutes* web site, where users could click for a 30-second snippet. "I don't know how it happened; we didn't push for that. There has to be somebody at MTV that really digs these guys."

Given that Johnny Q. Public is not the only Christian rock band with the attention of general market labels right now—Jars of Clay has made huge strides in recent weeks, and Newsboys have recently signed with Virgin for the general market—it's easy to wonder why all of this sudden attention. "There's two things happening," Elwood says. "SoundScan is making these people realize there's money to be made, and that's what they really care about."

"Two, most of these record company presidents that I've talked to are in a position where, because most of the old guard is leaving and most of the presidents now are in their 30s and 40s, and all have young kids about 9 and 10 years old.

"I was sitting in the office of one of these guys and he said, 'hey, we put gangsta rap on the map ... and those guys sitting in the lobby, they're my bodyguards. Do you think I got into this for that? This is not what I wanted.' These younger presidents are coming up and they're the ones who brought some of this music out



that we're hearing now, and now they're starting to feel responsible.

"Everybody's saying the same thing—they hate the word 'Christian' but they use the word 'positive'—every one of them says they like this more 'positive' music. There's this huge surge right now to get into the business of Christian music."

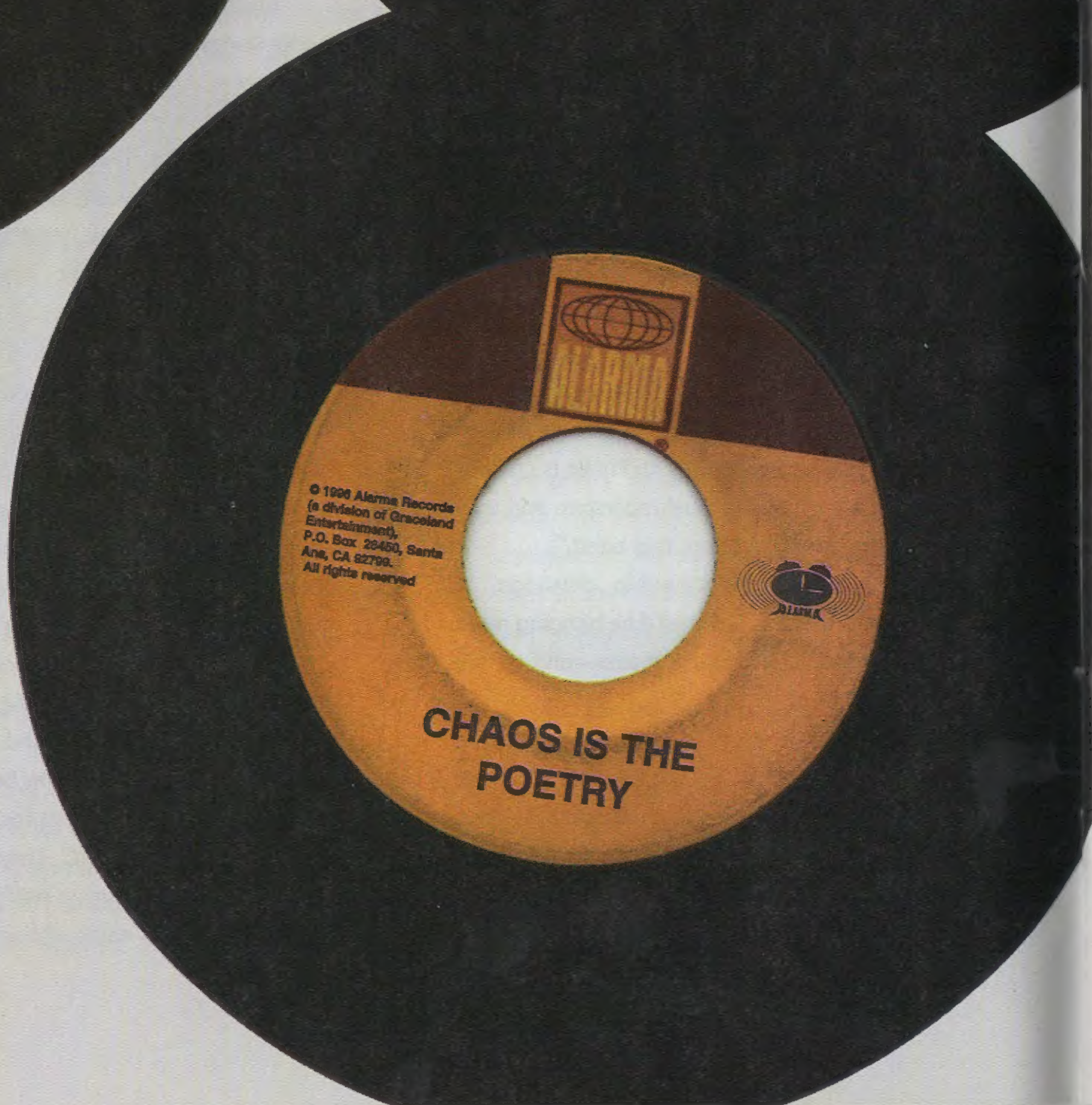
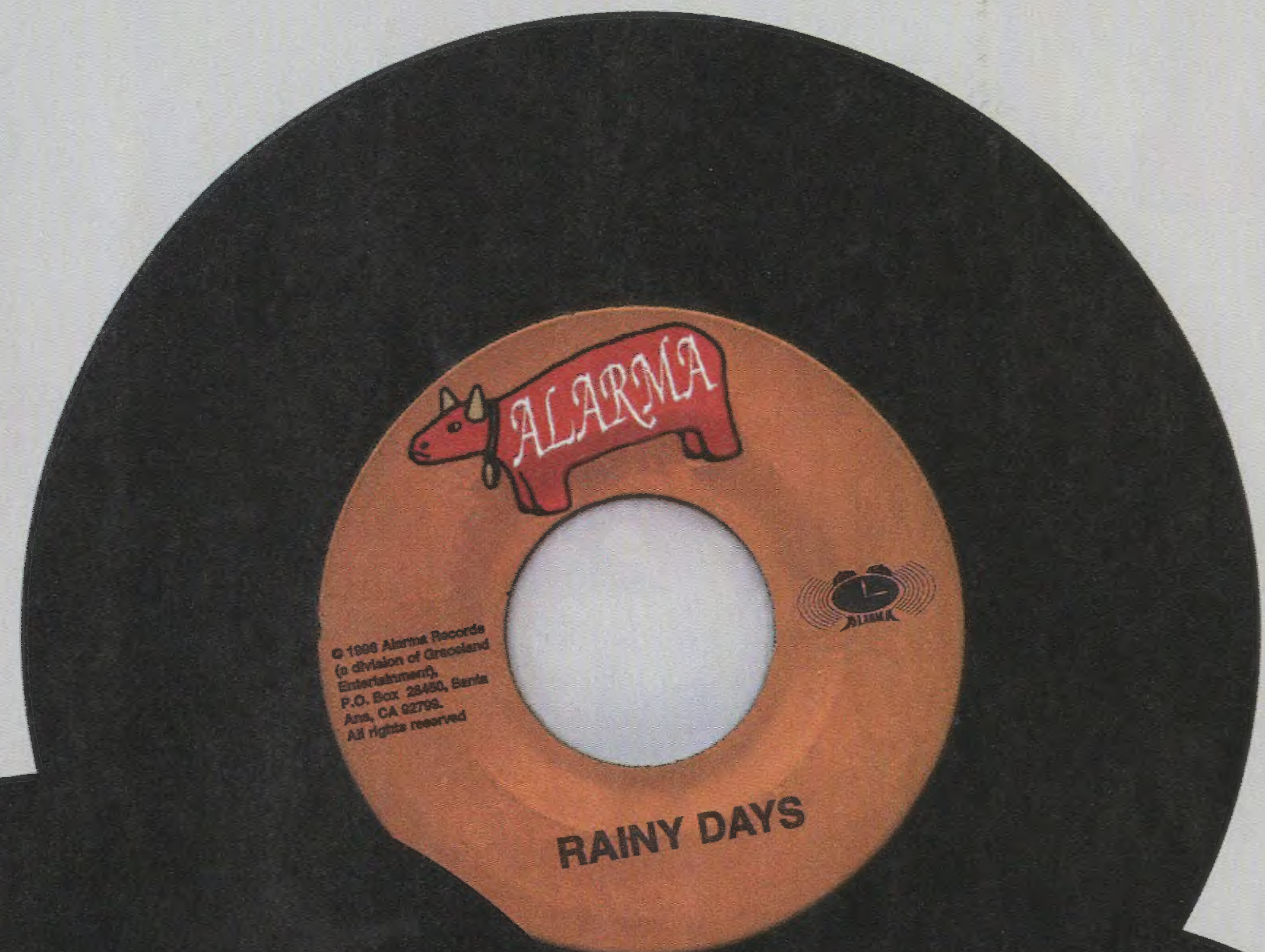
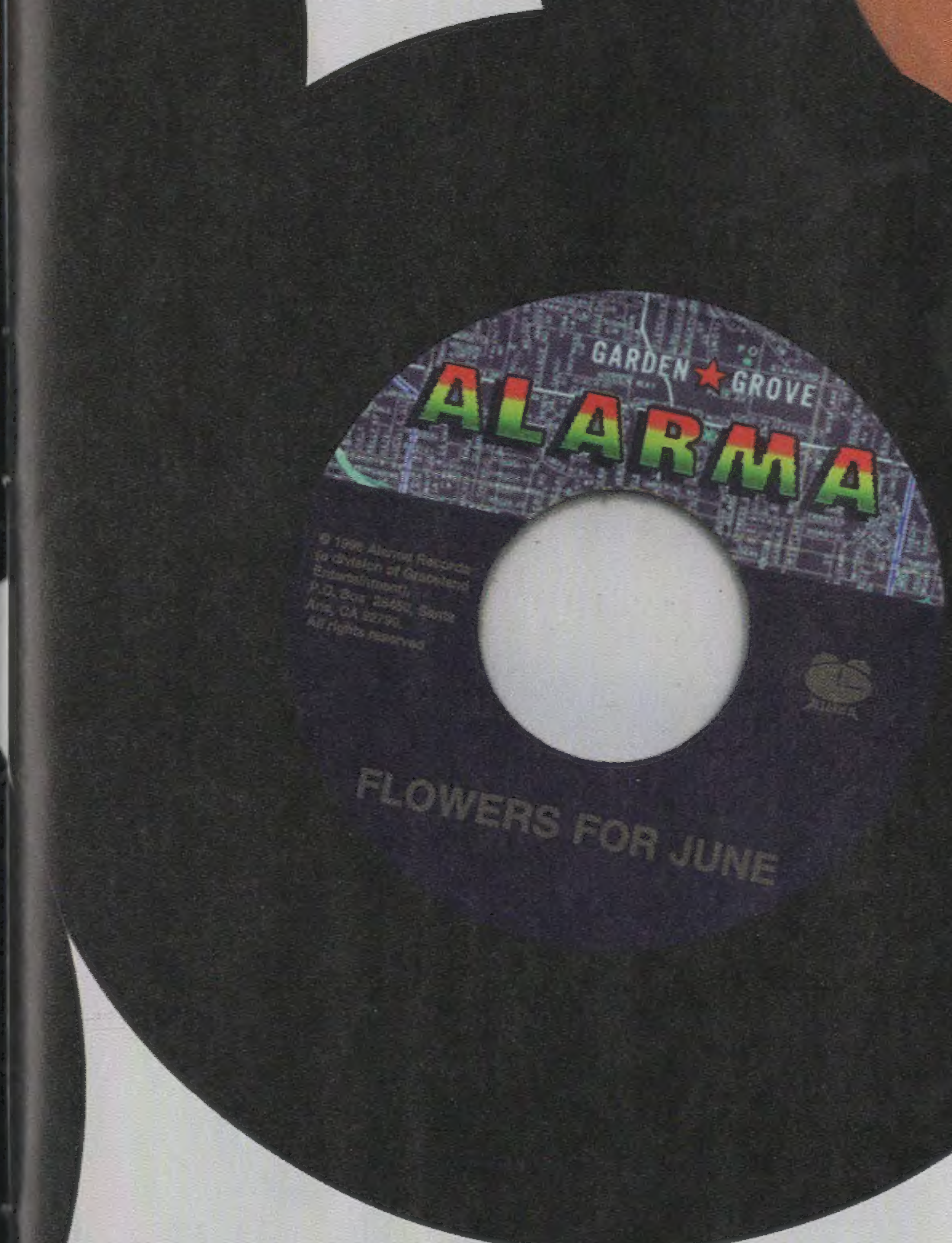
He says the long-term success of the crossovers—and of Christian music in the larger marketplace—depends on two factors. "It's up to the people who get there first to shine. If they do well—if they're sincere in their beliefs and if they make these people some money, I think this will last. I pray everybody who does land first in that arena is sincere because they'll sniff it out quick and it will turn back on them. Then the whole industry here will be a laughing stock. I really think it can happen, but those two things have to be in place, sincerity and actual success, because that's what drives that ship up there."

Guitarist Shawn Turner says the band has full artistic control. "Elektra really can't come in and say 'don't use these lyrics' and I don't think they want to. Talking to the A&R guy, I don't know if he's a Christian, but he really understands our vision; we've seen him get excited. He says so many people abuse their fortune and fame, but appreciates that we want to use whatever success we get for something good. He really identifies with what we want to do."

"Hopefully, if things go well, it will create a way bigger platform," guitarist Oran Thornton adds. "We'll be reaching more of the people who need to be reached, you know?"



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... somebody has to

the

is

not

Eric Champion's

not a geek

anymore...

no really,

he's not!

Champion. In walked a nerdy, squirrely little guy with a couple of keyboards, a computer, and a sister (who was rather cute, if I may). I remember thinking, "This could get ugly." I was a bit cynical and couldn't wait to laugh at yet another glorious attempt of a Christian trying to be hip.

computer—because—I—can't-play-a-real-instrument music. Time passed. Occasionally I would hear something about Eric Champion and how he was this new craze in Christian music. What? How? That settled it, Christian music had no hope; it would always be about five years behind what is actually cool.

ABOUT EIGHT YEARS ago in my hometown of St. Cloud, Fla., I was hangin' around a place called Heartland Worship Center. I was helping out the youth during their Monday night "Powerhouse" gig (well, actually I was friends with the pastor's son and had nothing better to do on a Monday evening). I remember the special music that evening—Eric

horrid. I like rock music—not this syn-tho-boogie techno!

and

and

and

515

By Frank Chimento
Photo-Illustration By Eric Jessen



Man, have I been foolish: Christian music has gone through a ... well ... a *Transformation* and so has Eric Champion.

With his new record, Eric Champion has more in common with Radiohead and Blur than with the techno-cheese-pop of yore. I wanted to see if this "change" is genuine—or just another Christian taking a shot at becoming what is acceptable. I was humbled, to say the least. I discovered Eric to be a young man of integrity and honesty. We asked Eric about his life, his music and his faith. Has he changed? Judge for yourself.

DO YOU EXPECT ANY CARRY-OVER FROM YOUR LAST AUDIENCE—OR WILL THIS RECORD BE FOR A TOTALLY NEW CROWD?

Most of the people aren't going to know what I was like before. It doesn't matter. If we looked at your freshman high school yearbook picture up against what you look like now, they'd look pretty different. The whole album, I think, states my present position and the fact that I totally reserve the right to change my mind tomorrow. We're all changing and that's the

whole idea of the album *Transformation*. We all change. Things that I was raised to believe before I was old enough to question them—that I believed totally—I don't believe at all now.

ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR?

I was raised in a denomination that thought it was wrong to go to movies, to wear jewelry, for girls to wear make-up. They thought it was wrong to ask a lot of questions about God. Just believe blindly what you've been taught. I see a lot of people cling to that because they're scared of what they may find if they ask questions. But I think life is a process of lessons that we have to learn. We have to ask questions. I think that a lot of the generation above us are blind followers. Their commitment to Christ is not what it should be; they aren't totally convinced of what they believe because they haven't tested it. They haven't asked the questions.

DO YOUR SONGS REFLECT THIS SPIRITUAL JOURNEY?

Very much so. The whole album depicts the struggle of the old man and the new man. What's normal for us is to sin. That's what we are. We are a piece of junk without God. We're doomed. And even with God there's a tremendous struggle in trying to become what we know we're supposed to be. That's the whole focus of the album, that whole process of change.

IS IT IRONIC THAT YOUR MUSIC IS CHANGING AS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE IDEA OF CHANGE?

It's not ironic at all. The whole idea of the album reflects what I've been going through. The whole past two years of my life have seen dramatic

changes in every area. Not all of it has been comfortable. In fact, most of it has been very uncomfortable. When I was doing that older style of music, I felt that I really had to carry most of it myself. I didn't feel that the music totally carried everything that I was wanting to say. However, now I can rely on the music a lot more to do my speaking for me and I don't have to be little Mr. Preacher and explain everything. The music can do a lot by itself.

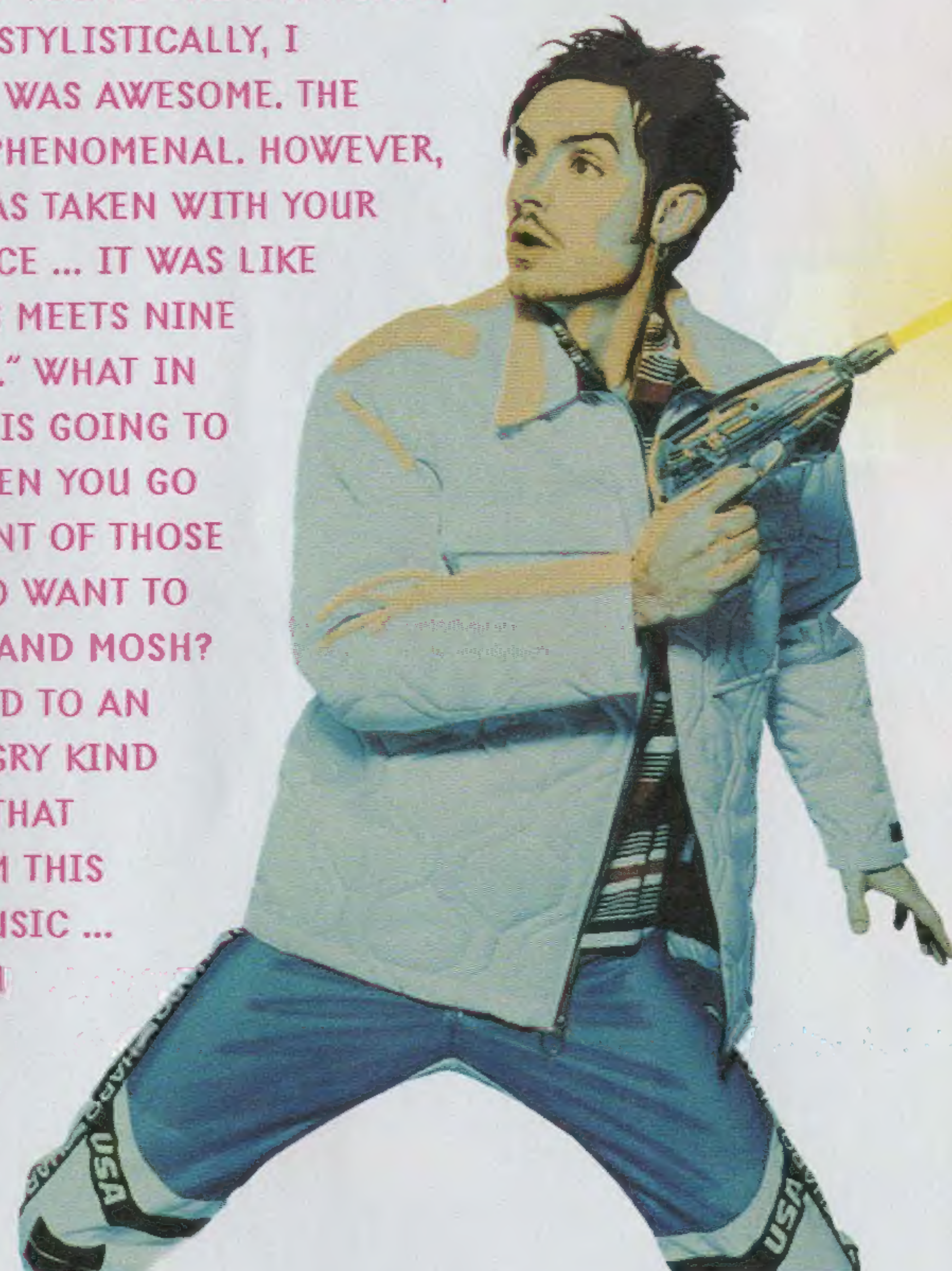
WHEN I SAW YOU AT THE SHOWCASE, MUSICALLY, STYLISTICALLY, I THOUGHT IT WAS AWESOME. THE BAND WAS PHENOMENAL. HOWEVER, I WAS NOT AS TAKEN WITH YOUR PERFORMANCE ... IT WAS LIKE "MR. ROGERS MEETS NINE INCH NAILS." WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING TO HAPPEN WHEN YOU GO OUT IN FRONT OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO STAGE DIVE AND MOSH? THEY'RE USED TO AN ALMOST ANGRY KIND OF ENERGY THAT COMES FROM THIS STYLE OF MUSIC ... WHEREAS IN THE PAST YOUR ENERGY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A POSITIVE, UPBEAT 'PRAISE GOD' KIND OF ENERGY.

That concert was the first time in years that I have not had anything to do on stage. For the past year and a half I've been playing the drums, fronting the band and singing. Before that it was keyboards. I felt totally out of place and I didn't even realize, because we were so busy in getting the album done, that I was going to get on stage and not have anything to do. I felt out of place. And I think the whole level of alternative music is changing, too. The bands that I look up to in alternative music, the more Euro style bands, are not that angst-ridden. Blur is not like that. Stone Roses isn't like that. Radiohead's not like that ... well, sometimes they are. Modern rock is more than what Nine Inch Nails is doing, or Soundgarden or even Nirvana. I think it's pretty narrow minded to say alternative has to reflect that one angst-ridden attitude.

AT THIS POINT IN YOUR LIFE, IS ERIC ANGRY?

No, not at all. I'm not angry at all. I am totally happy. Even though change is uncomfortable, it's progression. I'm very happy and very hopeful. But I am very unsure. I'm not as firmly convinced as I was when I was younger about everything. I don't believe that I have all the answers and that I know everything as adamantly as I did two or three years ago.

ERIC, OFF STAGE, IS HE A PREACHER?



I used to be. I'm not any more.

ON STAGE, ARE YOU A PREACHER OR A ROCK STAR?

I don't even know what a rock star would be. I'm definitely not a preacher. I would like to be a communicator. And I would like to be an entertainer. I would like for people to enjoy the music, enjoy the performance and I would love for the music to speak for itself and people to get something out of it.

NO MATTER HOW YOU SLICE IT, IT'S STILL ENTERTAINMENT.

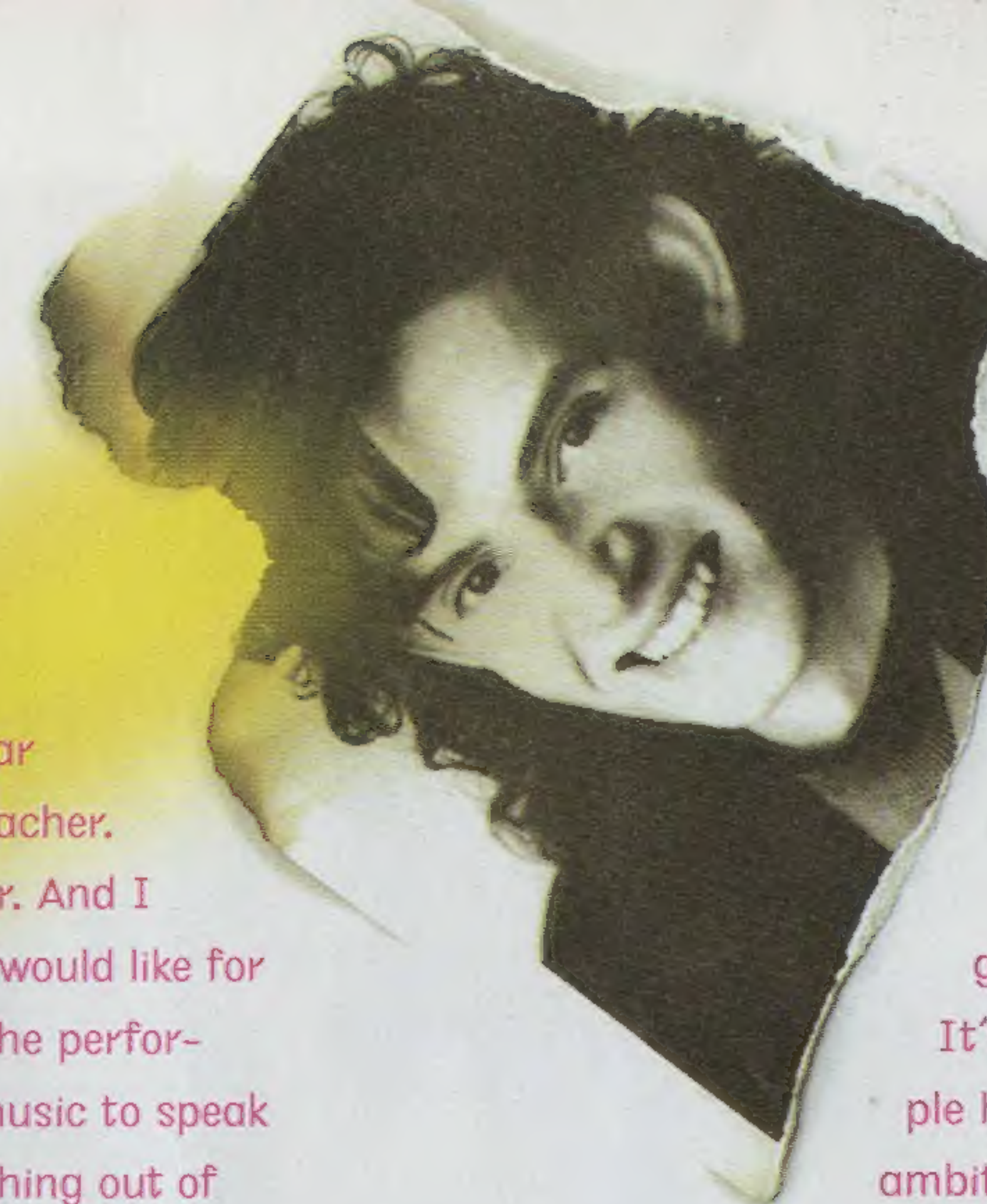
Well, if there is no entertainment value to preaching, nobody would listen. A preacher who doesn't have an effective way of using his words and his actions to draw you in is going to bore you to death. You're not going to listen to a word he says, regardless of the message. So, it's all entertainment. I don't care if it's Carman or Point of Grace or MxPx, they use colors, they use sounds, they use different things to draw you in. The primary focus should not be on whether it's entertainment or not, but should be on what's driving that entertainment.

AT THIS PARTICULAR POINT WITH THIS ALBUM WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO COMMUNICATE?

I hope that some kids can get from my music what caused me to write it. I don't want to be a preacher anymore, because I've seen these hyped up emotional experiences where you get hundreds of kids down to the altar and they make a decision on an emotional moment that's not real and doesn't last. I believe with all my heart that the only real and true lasting decisions are the ones you make when you're alone. So, I'm not into preaching at all. I don't have all the answers. I'm not going to tell you this is what God told me. The album just represents what is going on in my life. My struggles with temptation and dating and relationships. It's just all personal experience and I hope that someone can get something from it.

IS ERIC CHAMPION A SOLOIST OR A BAND?

I want to have a band. I would love to find



guys that could stick around for years. I mean it would be us for five, six, seven years. And I'm looking for those guys right now. It's just that people have different ambitions and different goals and different

dreams and you have to find people with the same vision. That's a tough thing cause even when you think you've found it things happen, you know.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE THIS IS GOING TO LEAD?

My goal right now is to find some great guys and put together a great band and just play and play and play. Out of that hopefully the next move will come. We'll probably look back at what we are today and say "What were we thinking?" Who knows. But I'm along for the ride. I'm enjoying the ride. ①



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By Dan MacIntosh

poor old

The transition from a young man to an adult has never been an easy one. Growing up in the public eye must be even harder—insert any child star you can think of here. Poor Old Lu, much like the characters in the

Narnia Chronicles—from where they take their name—are young people thrown into some mature situations. With *A Picture of the Eighth Wonder*, Poor Old Lu reflects the reality of their awkward growth by employing new recording approaches, and reflecting the

life-changing experiences which have taken place with the band of late.

"The new record is very different than anything we've ever done," declares guitarist Aaron Sprinkle with modest understatement. "We've changed a lot of the way we write songs. I don't know if you'd say we're maturing, but we're experimenting with different styles of doing things."

more confused. The album's a bit more honest and realistic."

The record has this feel, both because the band has gone through many great testimony-producing trials, but because the members have gone



an aspiring producer also.

"Oh, yeah,"

responds the proud father.

Fatherhood is a great and proud experience, but also reminds a man of his awesome experiences.

"When you get married and stuff," he recounts, "you have to become a responsible person, because you have another human being that you care about more than yourself that you have to provide for and take care of. And when both of you, through the miracle of God, create this child—a new human—it's just mindboggling. When my son was born, I almost felt like blinds were taken off my eyes, and life opened up into a whole different section that I never even knew was there. It's a beautiful section that I never even knew I could feel. I think a lot of it's just growing up. I'm pretty young to be a father." At 22, to be married, a father, and in band that's just released its fourth project on a record label, Sprinkle and the other guys in Poor Old Lu are not your normal bunch of young

through some expected growth spurts (as all humans go through). These changes are the kind that not only separate men from the boys, but also transform the boys into men. Since their last album,

Sin, there have been two marriages and one birth, and a whole lot of unedited reflection upon these new experiences.

When I called to interview the band, Gene Eugene (of Adam Again), who was there to help the band finish the album, answered the phone and described Aaron Sprinkle's 14-month-old boy Eliot as a lad who spent a good part of his time turning knobs and touching the equipment. One wonders if—like his dad, who has produced albums by Grammatrain, among others—the young one is

One area of change

took place in the writing of the material. "We did a lot of the writing in the studio.

We went in mostly with just ideas and rough arrangements of the songs, and we pretty much wrote it in the studio, so everything on the tape is real fresh and new."

In the studio, the band slowed the tempo of some songs, giving them a different emotional outlook than some previous recordings. "The whole record has a kind of melancholy feel to it," Sprinkle continues. "Some of the songs even border on sounding eerie in some spots, but in a good way."

"I don't want to say it's more depressing," adds singer and lyricist Scott Hunter, "and I don't want to say it's less sure or less positive, but it is a bit

"We're all so young, and regardless of all the mature choices we've made, we're still all going through stuff."

adults.

"We're all so young, and regardless of all the mature choices we've made, we're still all going through stuff," comments Hunter. "There's a lot of change. This album is more honest, which I hope is the biggest thing that's come out of all this stuff that's happens to all of us in the last year or two."

While Sprinkle has been adjusting to being a dad, Hunter has been learning what it means to be a husband. Who he's seen in the mirror is a much different man than the one he expected to encounter. "I realize, since I've been married, that I'm not as strong of a person as I thought I was. I'm not as nice of a person as I thought. I have a lot more faults than ever knew. And I

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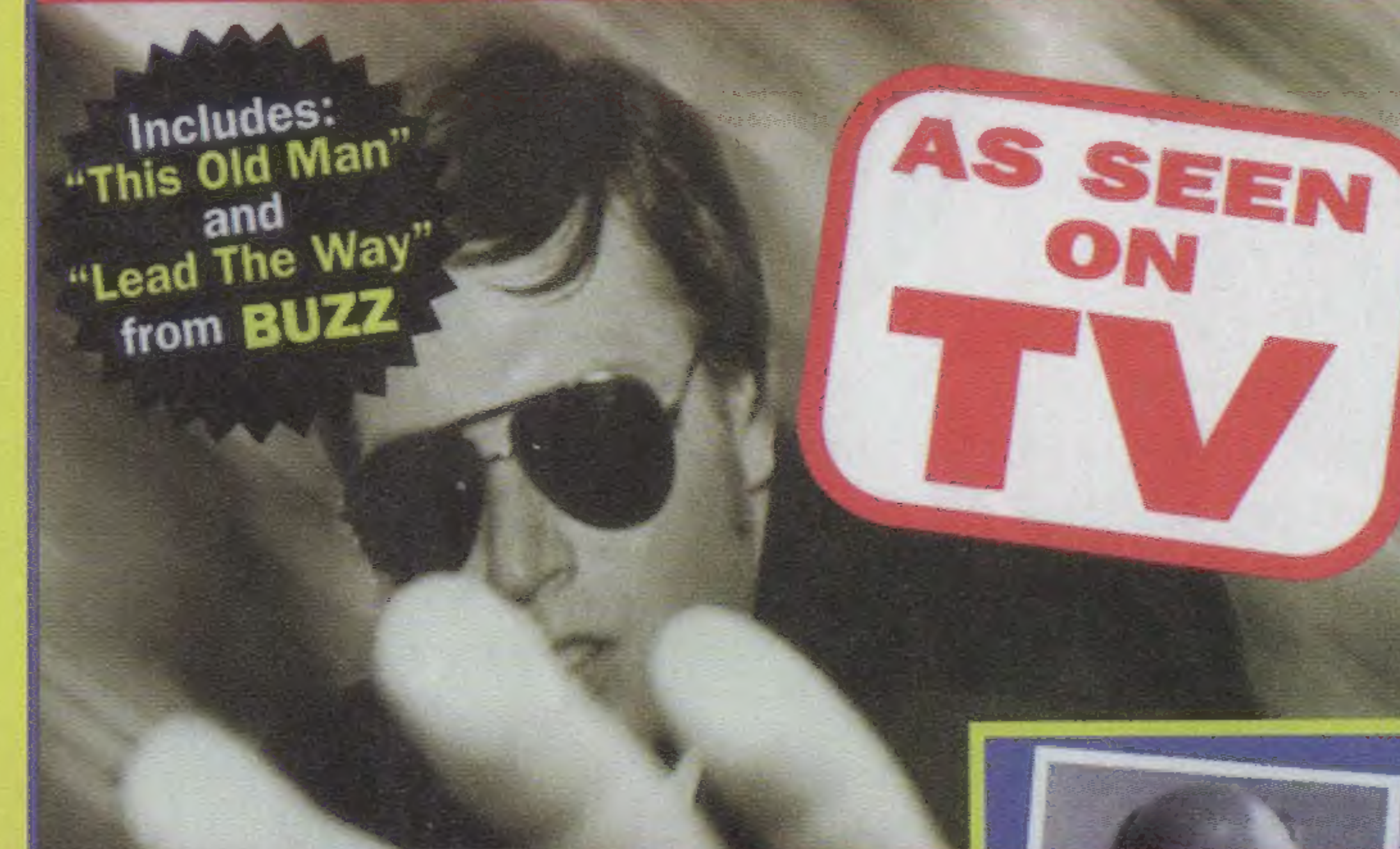
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While Sprinkle has been adjusting to being a dad, Hunter has been learning what it means to be a husband. Who he's seen in the mirror is a much different man than the one he expected to encounter. "I realize, since I've been married, that I'm not as strong of a person as I thought I was. I'm not as nice of a person as I thought. I have a lot more faults than ever knew. And I think in a big way this album is showing that kind of stuff. I'm not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, and I'm going through a lot of pain, and I hurt a lot. And it affects my life in a major way, and I know that it's not the end. I know that that's not what it's supposed to be, but it is a true thing. It is a real thing."

Hunter and Poor Old Lu put their hearts on the line when they recorded *A Picture of the Eighth Wonder*. It's not easy to spill your guts to the record buying public, but it has the potential to help listeners who might need to know they're not the only ones with these pains. "I'd like to think our albums have progressed," wished Hunter, "musically, lyrically, and spiritually, as well. So that somebody who is a Christian could grow with our music as we're growing."

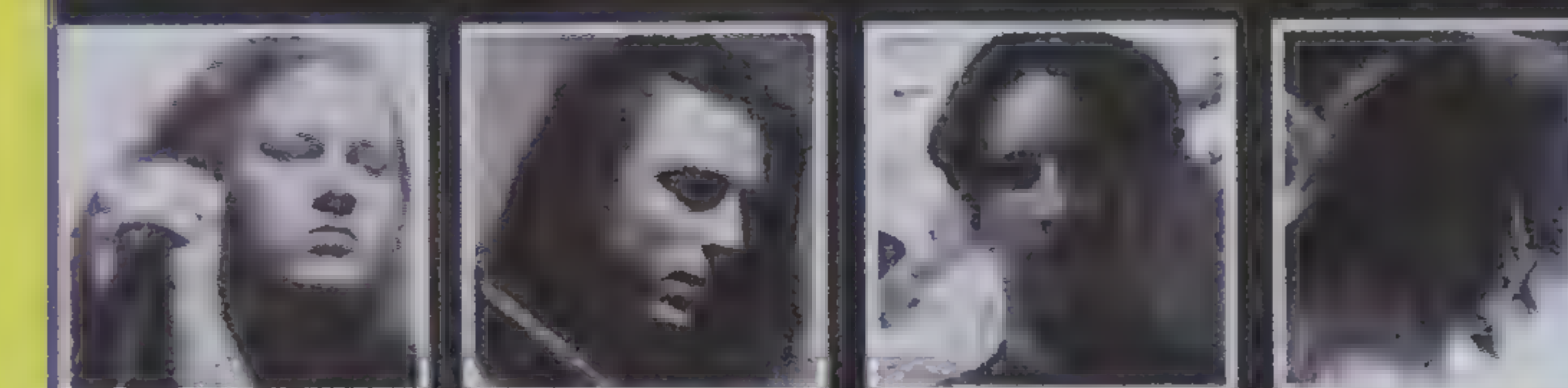
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"We gotta keep this coffee coming, man." Gene Eugene has been up since 4 a.m. so he could make an 8 o'clock show at a small university in the middle of the northeast Indiana corn fields.

The four Lost Dogs sit down and work out their song list before Mike Roe goes out to warm the crowd up with a solo acoustic set. Eugene, Terry Taylor and Derri Daugherty throw out ideas while Roe strings up his guitar.

So far, they've scribbled down the song titles "You Got to Move," "Scenic Routes," and "Built for Glory" on a piece of crumpled notebook paper. Eugene suggests "Bad Indigestion" to "wake 'em up," perhaps followed by one of Roe's "famous blues numbers."

Eugene, his trademark baseball cap missing and Green Day-esque bleach job in its stead, goes over the partial list scratched in front of him and checks the time-length of each song. He stops a minute. "I'll play 'Built for Glory' as long as we don't play it too slow ... please don't play it too slow ... Mike."

"I'd rather not rush it," Roe retorts blandly.

the whole thing."

While Roe goes off to the side to warm his pipes and fingers up a little, the remaining Dogs hammer out the rest of the list and try to figure out how long Roe will play. Daugherty asks, "Mike, you using any tracks tonight?"

"Yeah, I'll throw out tracts ... *Holy Joe, You Goofed, Bernardo.*"

Soon a set of about 25 songs is listed. Meanwhile, Roe is giving a college kid with a goatee and gray beret



last minute instructions on how to

do the introduction: "OK, do it like

this," he says, "'Ladies and gentlemen' ... then pause, then pause ... 'the only man on stage ...'"

The kid follows his instructions, which is

"Sorry,

we're used to playing the big rooms," Eugene says at the outset, apologizing for some minor technical problems. At one point of the set, Roe's strap came off his guitar. Later, he sang the

wrong verse. At one time or another, each Dog laughed at another for missing his cue.

The four performed a bare bones set. Four guitars. No drums or bass. Daugherty and Taylor strummed their acoustics, Eugene was on a quite electric while Roe took care of percussion, bass riffs and lead guitar on his

Fender. When you remember that he's also the opening act, Roe clearly carries quite a bit of the show.

"It's much

harder for me," Roe says. "They're all just kind of strumming and singing, and I have to do all this ... stuff. It's very hard to do." He far prefers those gigs

where the Lost Dogs

play with a full band.

Actually, Roe and the rest of the Dogs don't seem to think much of what would seem a lopsided load of responsibility or share of the spotlight. "Everybody has their own rhythm," Taylor explains. "Everybody has their own way of working." The experienced veteran is the most laid-back of the bunch. His quiet growl of voice has a mildly cynical, sober tone.

The Dogs' Way slowly defined the roles of each member over time, and has slowly won a special place in each member's heart. In hind-

sight, none of the Dogs were sure if the original project would actually fly or not. Most of the members knew each other fairly well and decided to get together and make a collection of mainly gospel standards and began to evolve

from there. When the four—whose regular gigs include The 77s, Adam Again, Daniel Amos, Swirling Eddies and The Choir, as well as production help with several up-and-coming



young bands—finally gathered at Eugene's Greenroom studio, each member had brought some prewritten music. Roe brought a sketch blues song; Taylor brought four or five finished songs; Eugene had complete songs without lyrics; and Daugherty brought some ideas for a few numbers.

Roe, whom Daugherty pegs the

"most skeptical" of the four, was somewhat surprised at the quality of the music that came from the partnership. The rest were inspired to polish their unfinished pieces, many times collaborating on lyrics and music. "A couple of times we'd just sit around with a piece of paper, and we each just wrote down lines," Daugherty says.

This was all done in the back room of the studio. Instead of the all-business walls of the studio, the back room's fireplace, coffee machine and circle of couches and chairs provided the atmosphere for the album. One of the members would bring in a song,

each member would learn his part, and an hour or so later the four guitar parts and the basic vocal tracks were laid with guitar, drums and other assorted instru-

quickly—there weren't any ego conflicts, we knew how to handle each other's idiosyncrasies, and adjust to one another so quickly—it was such a kick. The songs just started taking on a life of their own," Taylor says.

Daugherty explains the success of the Dogs is because of the special outlet of friendship, accountability and music the group provides for each member. "We all have certain things musically that we like that aren't necessarily appropriate for our bands. It's not the kind of pressure that you have when you're doing your own band thing. In this instance, you can



kind of lean on everybody else. I can say, 'Hey, Terry, here's a melody, what do you think?'"

"It's pretty much a four-headed thing," Eugene says. Taylor calls their way "pretty much a back-to-the-roots kind of thing."

As the Lost Dogs prepare for a month long tour this spring, which Taylor says he hasn't done in years, the camaraderie will be especially important. The tour and their new album, *Green Room Serenade*, will surface sometime in May.

Though perhaps a bit rockier,

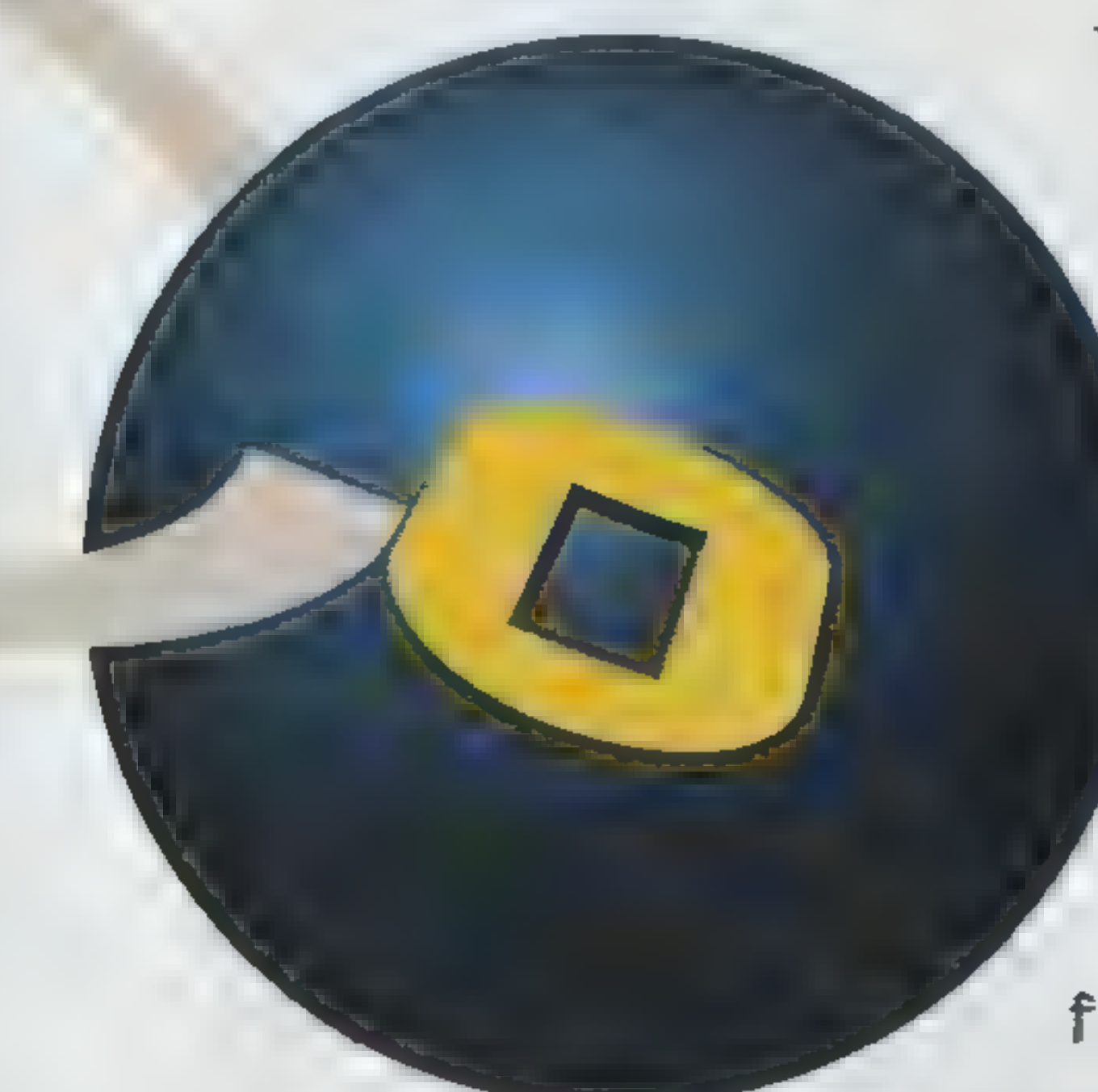
Eugene says the upcoming release will fit right in with the personality found on the

first two Dogs albums. And though

about two years have gone by since the making of their last record, *Red Riding Hood*, the same Dogs' philosophy is still present.

"You could almost take one day out of any of the records and plug it into another record and there are similar things going on," Eugene says.

Maybe that consistency is what keeps four musicians—who have separately made names for themselves—writing, recording and touring as a group. The Dogs' Way has a quality that transcends the ages of its members and allows enough room for four stars to explode. 2



ments to be added later. "Because everything gelled so



THE DOGS' WAY

By J. Peter Roth

Though the mood is light and the brotherly sarcasm flows as freely as the coffee, they consider the song style, the key the song is in and who wrote the song, as they carefully direct the set into what will seem a nearly effortless experience for the crowd—an experience come to be known as The Dogs' Way.

"We have this thing called 'The Dogs' Way,'" Roe later explains. "We go in there and it's sloppy, you know, you just kind of throw it together. The songs are thrown together. The performances are thrown together. Everything about it is just kind of ... casual and fun, without being half-baked, you know what I mean?"

Eugene, Taylor and Daugherty continue on the list, often digressing to less pressing topics, while Roe moves about the room.

Roe speaks up as he sorts through a bag of equipment and expresses his disapproval of the form the set is taking. "It's always the same thing," he says. He suggests the "strong beginning, introspective middle, and strong finish" approach, or perhaps the "Paul McCartney plateau" to the set.

"I like the Petra approach," the long quiet Daugherty says, "where you bore 'em through

followed by a rousing, collective hoot from the audience of close to 200.

After the show: It's about 10:30 now, and the Dogs are rooting through containers of stale pretzels and snack mixes. Most decide to pass, except for Roe.

"It was a little rough," Daugherty assesses of the show



that night.

The stage was small and atmosphere relaxed, leaving a feeling much like an *MTV Unplugged* special. Mostly quiet during the songs, followed by a wave of what seems almost neighborly gratitude after each one. Only this show has a little more than the usual interaction between band and audience.

How

I can still remember my first impression of the Gospel Music Association convention when I first moved to Nashville two years ago: If Christian music is a sandwich, I thought, then you have to eat an awful lot of cheese to get to the baloney.

Granted, it's always easier to throw rocks if you're standing on the outside—and those under the sinful impression that God is somehow geographically challenged are usually the ones to cast the first stones. One of the easy targets of critics has been the annual Dove Awards, the ceremony that closes the GMA convention every April. Those who've complained about the Doves have usually forgotten that the same complaints are also directed at the Grammys and the Emmys and the Tonys and any other award that has been given to anyone, anywhere.

But, the Christian music industry has indeed made great strides in the last couple of years, and the GMA—and the Dove Awards—has made great efforts to reflect that.

Bruce Koblish, president of the Gospel Music Association, says the GMA has been ironing out the problems, but that their responsibility is to merely reflect what has happened already in the industry. "We're designed to be reactionary," he says. "The GMA can never introduce new ideas. The awards show is always following what happens in the industry. If it seems sometimes like we have a slow reaction time, it's because it may take as long as two years to react."

One of those reactions includes two new modern rock categories, which this year includes nominated albums and songs from Johnnry Q. Public, Charlie Peacock, Steve Taylor, Prayer Chain, Sixpence None the Richer and Grammatrain. Koblish points out that the alternative categories were not added on a whim. "We are not a marketing tool," he says. "It's not our place if one good alternative band comes along to say, 'we need to make a new category for them.' We want to make sure that alternative music is established in the Christian market and is here to stay."

For a category to survive the first round of voting, there needs to be at least ten nominations. Many categories get as many as 30 or 40 nominations; however, out on the fringes, sometimes a category may only get ten or 12 votes. Last year, there weren't enough nominations for one of the rap categories—and the few nominations there were had to be shuttled off to another category. "We had to split them up and send the nominations off to the rock, pop and urban categories," Koblish explains. "If we have fewer than ten nominations, we don't feel that legitimizes the category."

Now, since it only takes one record company vote or three professional votes to get a nomination in the first place, it's pretty safe to say that—since there were easily 10 valid rap albums released that year, somebody forgot to vote—including the artists themselves.

The second round of voting whittles the list down to the top five nominations in each category (except for Song of the Year, which has ten nominations). The third round is how we end up with the winners on Dove night.

Koblish agrees there's always a danger that politics may be involved in the voting process. "There's a certain part where it's the sheer nature of it," he concedes. "But we don't put our heads in the sand. We work hard to create a system that's fair and equitable, where the individual votes count."

To that end, three years ago the GMA put together some pretty strict rules. "We added teeth to our rules. Any indications of block voting, we will—and, on a regular basis, do—throw out votes. People think there's just a few people in control of the votes. That's not the case at all."

This past year, the Grammy Awards tried to update their image and created a secret panel to monitor the nominees, hoping to get "cooler" artists in. Koblish won't pass judgment on the Grammys, but does feel the "secret committee" idea would definitely not work with the Doves. "We try very hard to be fair and open, to give everyone equal access. It would be very dangerous if we did something like that ... it would really damage what we've accomplished up to this point. We believe that we have a good system. If we put a committee together to manipulate the votes, it would make the individual feel like his vote is worthless. It's like, why should I vote for the President of the United States if I find out someone else is going to decide for me, anyway?"

Koblish also welcomes other organizations that want to award excellence in various genres of Christian music. "Our job here at GMA is to promote all styles of Gospel music. We would like to think we keep doing a better job of it every year, but we need more exposure. So, if someone wants to come along and promote one segment of the industry, we would be the last ones to block someone else."

Koblish says that, ultimately, the GMA is just the umbrella organization. "How do you please everybody? We go from the Newsboys to the Cathedrals; we try to represent everything. Because we are so diversified, there have always been complaints because someone felt we slighted their specific style of music. Well, I always have to ask, if your music is not represented, are you a member? Do you vote?"

Becoming a voting member of the Gospel Music Association is as easy as, well, becoming a member. Anyone who joins at least 30 days before the mailing of the entry form can have a say. A "Professional Member" (someone who actually makes some kind of money out of Christian music) chooses up to 24 of the 40 Dove Awards categories. An "Associate Member" (anyone who has an interest in Gospel music) can vote in six categories (Song of the Year, Artist of the Year, New Artist of the Year, Male Vocalist, Female Vocalist and Group of the Year) on the final ballot. To become a member (pro membership is \$50; associate membership is \$25), write to the GMA at 1205 Division Street, Nashville, TN 37203. Call them at (615) 242-0303, or (615) 254-9755/fax.

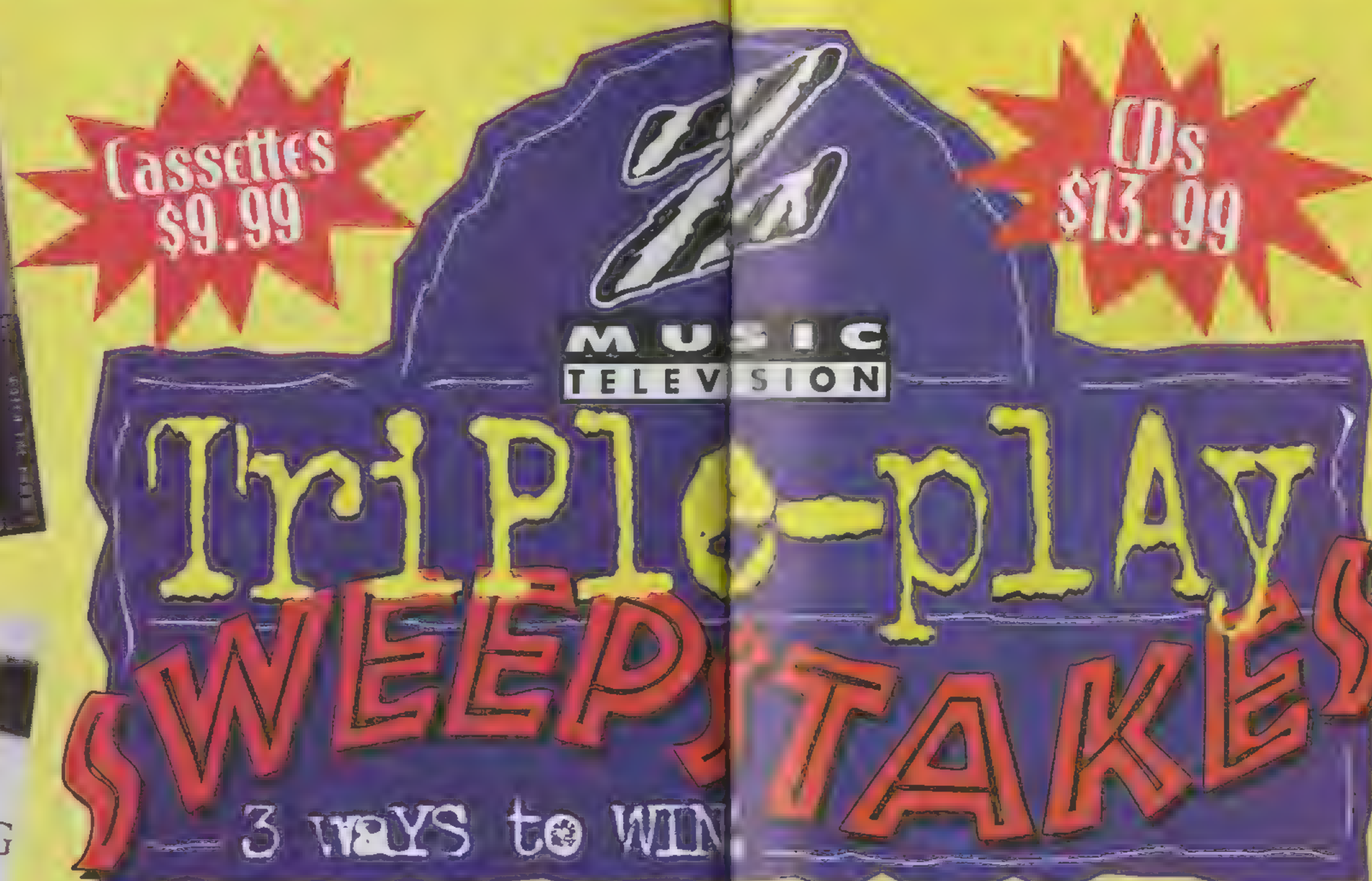
Koblish feels the potential is there to continually improve the GMA—and the industry. "You need to set up a process that will work most of the time, and we have a system that works most of the time. It comes down to the voters. It's embarrassing to us when there aren't enough nominees in the rap category and we have to put them in with rock or metal. Then people ask us, 'Don't you know that doesn't belong there?' Well, yes, we do. But since there weren't enough nominations, it was a compromise we had to make. This system only works best when everyone votes."



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The Doves

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Bank Shots

BY STEVE ROTH

"SO, HAS ANYONE EVER SAID you sound like Billy Corgan?" is the question posed to Driver Eight vocalist Matt McCartie. After having discussed Godless existentialism, psycho-babble and the "sensitive, artsy thing," a question about similarities with the Smashing Pumpkins seems the obvious choice.

"I think I'd compare myself to him in that, I can't really hold notes, so I end up doing different things to deceive people into thinking I can sing," replies the singer with a laugh, nonetheless flattered by the comparison. "Man, if I ever got to the point where I could be as talented as he is ... He may not have far to go.

The story of Driver Eight is a whirlwind dream come true. In less than a year after forming, the band released *Watermelon*, a buzz clip of edgy, guitar-driven rock, pop melodies and lyrics that observe and confront the human condition.

McCartie, guitarist Andy Blunda and bassist Alex Parnell played together only a couple of months before getting a record deal. The three students wrote songs in their Biola University dorm, knocking music and lyrics around through one amp servicing two guitars.

"The idea was rooted out of, 'hey, let's get together and play,' and then, 'hey, maybe we have some songs here,' which lead to 'hey, maybe we can play a show,'" recounts McCartie, a communications major who graduates this spring. "And then the first show we end up getting a record deal."

With the label employing the production prowess of Armand Petri (Sixpence None The Richer, Goo Goo Dolls, 10,000 Maniacs), McCartie admits having some reservations at first. "I was concerned about the type of artists that he'd worked with—I mean, I like them and everything, but I didn't want my record to sound like them.

"We did some pre-production and he was hacking and chopping at songs, trying to slim them down. At first I went through this whole sensitive, artsy, don't-touch-my-songs type of thing."

McCartie got over it, eventually, and a friendship developed as producer and band co-habited in the same apartment throughout the recording period.



Talking to McCartie you find an upbeat, likable guy with a laugh akin to Pauly Shore's. However, listening to some of the cuts on *Watermelon*, you find a sardonic commentary on the world around him. "In general, the record is very cynical. I'm not jaded or anything, but I handle my frustrations with cynicism."

Rather than point a finger and preach, McCartie gives the songs a sarcastic bite. For instance, "Cheers" is about people who hear the truth but don't like it, so they decide it's all relative; "Carrousel" was inspired during the time he worked at The House of Blues in Hollywood, where he observed how people chase things around in circles, attempting to find happiness; and the title track assails McCartie's psychoanalytical acquaintances who "talk just to hear their lips flap."

The whole ball of yarn could be summed up with "Waiting For Godot," a caustic barb aimed at existentialism, as presented in the classic play by Samuel Beckett. For existentialists, he explains, the backbone of their philosophy is that God is dead.

McCartie also remembers a similar point made by another performance, culled from the theatrical tradition known as Theatre of the Absurd. "The stage would go black and off to the right you'd hear a baby cry. Then lights would come up, exposing all this trash and rubble everywhere. As the lights faded back to black, off the left you hear a man taking his final breath. Then it was over. The basic philosophy was: you're born; you live; it's crap, and then you die.

"I hope that we make people think," he continues. "I hope people look into our lyrics and consider things about their lives. We're not trying to evangelize lyrically, but if you'd come up and ask me what 'Strange' is about, I'd say, 'Well, it's about God's grace; let me tell you about it.' If you want to get into what makes up our lyrics, they definitely point to the Lord, even the cynical songs which, more or less, poke fun at all the ridiculous things. Maybe that's not necessarily a good thing to do, but when I feel like I know truth, an absolute truth, then the other options seem kind of silly." ❧

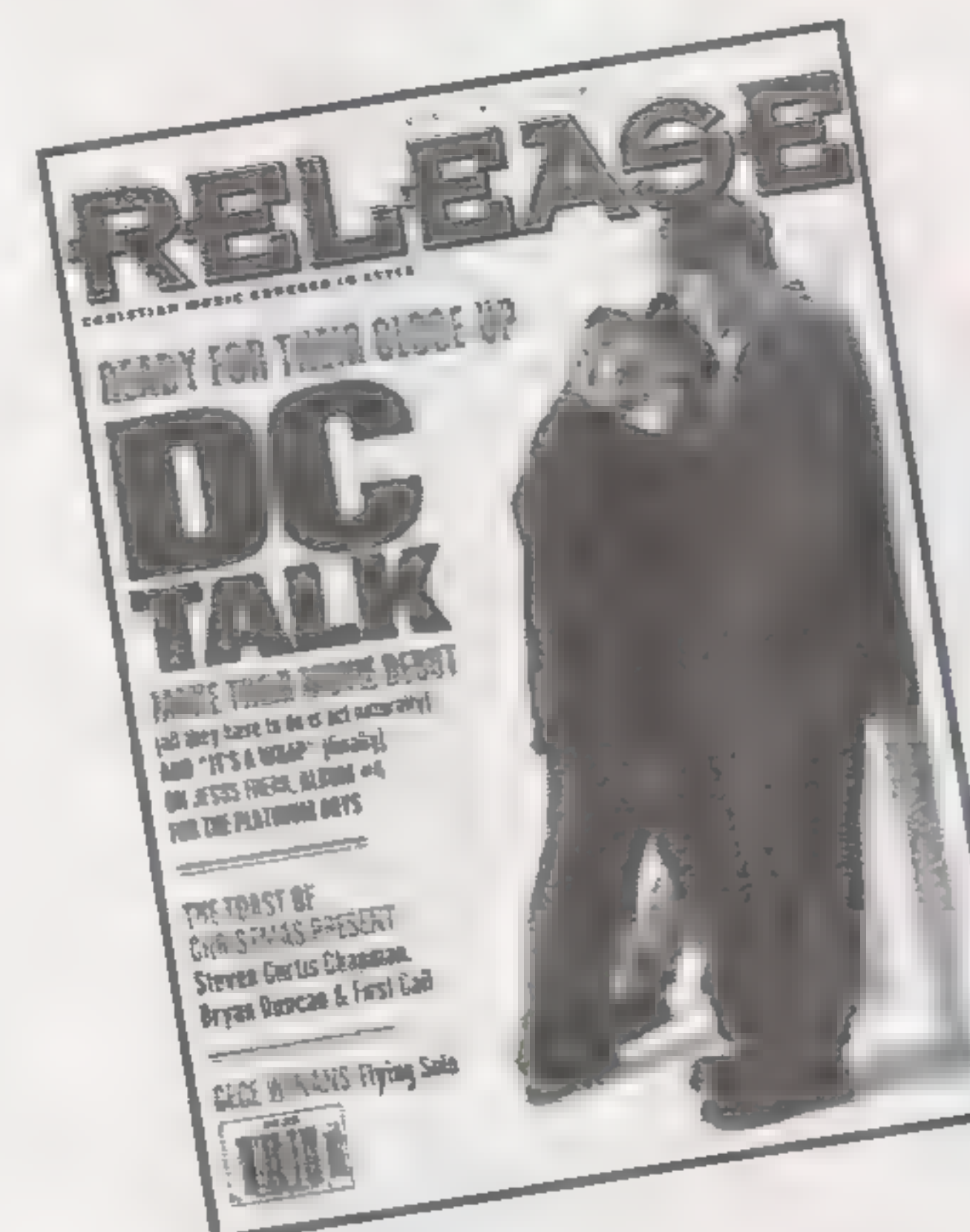


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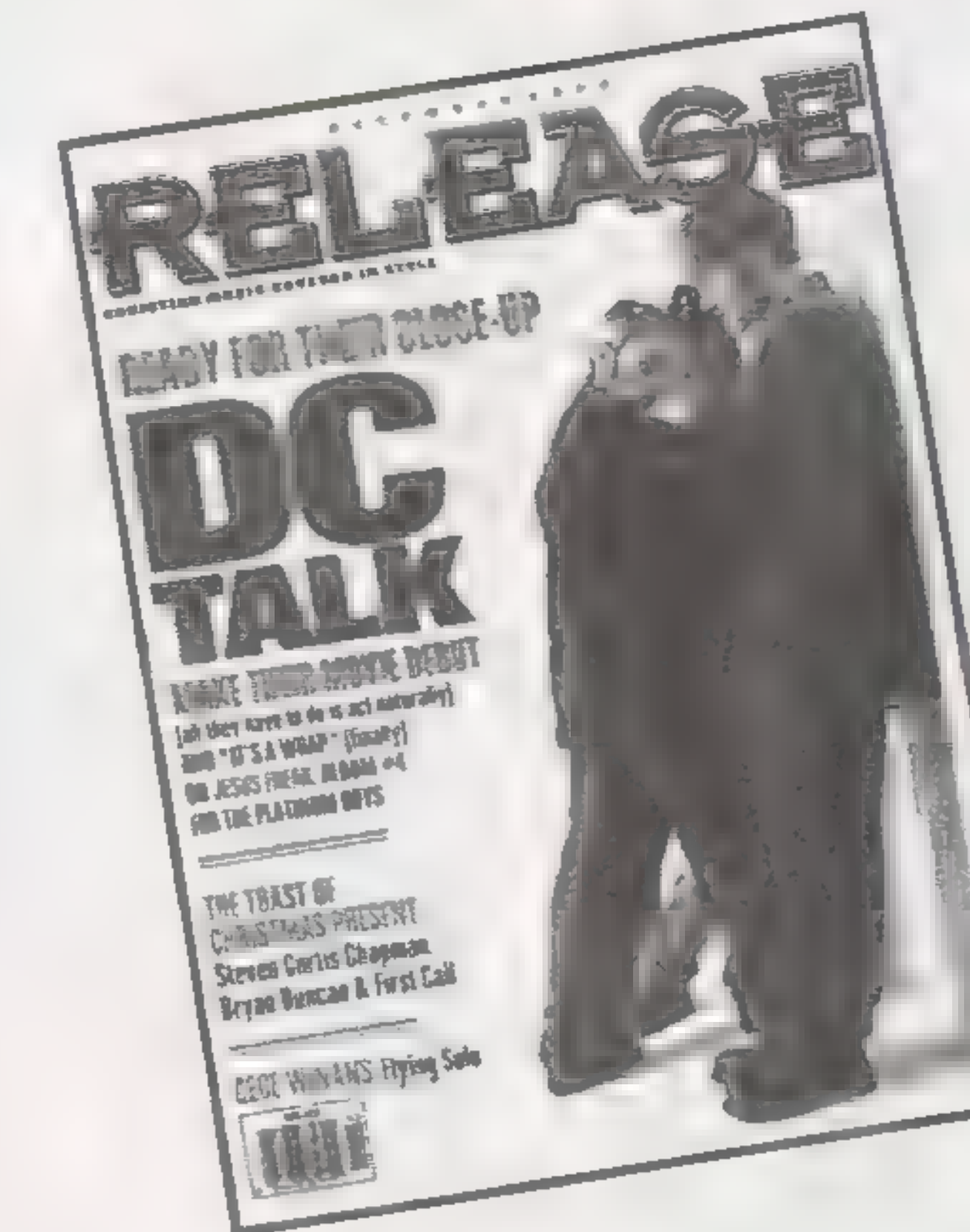
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BY STEVE ROTH

"SO, HAS ANYONE EVER SAID you sound like Billy Corgan?" is the question posed to Driver Eight vocalist Matt McCartie. After having discussed Godless existentialism, psycho-babble and the "sensitive, artsy thing," a question about similarities with the Smashing Pumpkins seems the obvious choice.

"I think I'd compare myself to him in that, I can't really hold notes, so I end up doing different things to deceive people into thinking I can sing," replies the singer with a laugh, nonetheless flattered by the comparison. "Man, if I ever got to the point where I could be as talented as he is ... " He may not have far to go.

The story of Driver Eight is a whirlwind dream come true. In less than a year after forming, the band released *Watermelon*, a buzz clip of edgy, guitar-driven rock, pop melodies and lyrics that observe and confront the human condition.

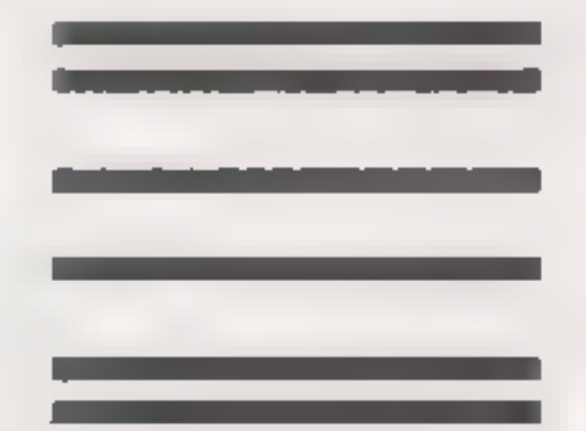


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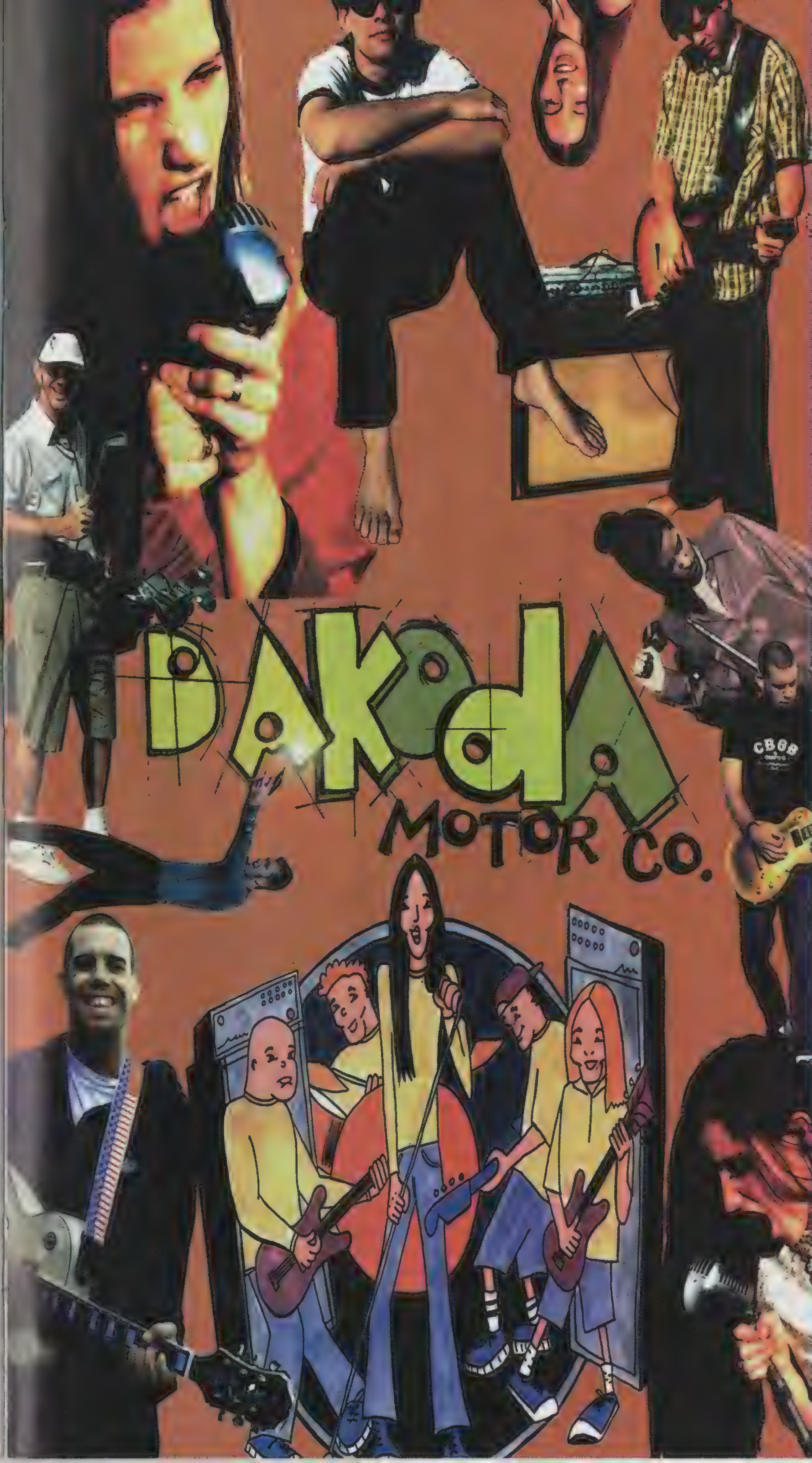
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MC 900 FT. JESUS. Jesus and Mary Chain. The Jesus Lizard. What's in a name? When you claim the name above all names as part of your band's moniker, ears perk up and questions tend to be asked. While it's obvious the aforementioned bands may preach another "Jesus," the members of Seven Day Jesus are straightforward about the Gospel.

"I wouldn't do this if it wasn't a ministry," says drummer Matt Sumpter.

rock edge, the band cites "every influence you can possibly think of and then some." Including Tennessee Ernie Ford? "Well, maybe except him," laughs bassist Wes Simpkins.

According to singer/songwriter Brian McSweeney, their music is "passionate and deep ... at times heavy, usually with a good groove.

McSweeney continues, "Above all, it's fun. I mean, there are so many bands out there that are so good but they are not fun to

What they don't have yet is the polish that comes from time spent on the road, a situation that is currently being addressed. Seven Day Jesus is in the middle of a 100-plus date tour, supporting their new CD, *The Hunger*.

"The record deal was a dream come true because we're so young," says McSweeney, who at 20 is the band's oldest member. "But we're still paying our dues. There are no luxuries. Everything is going



"We all had the same deal growing up," guitarist Chris Beatty explains. "Our parents raised us in church. We went because that's just what you do on Sunday. We thought being a Christian was just following the rules. We came to realize that to be a Christian you have to have a relationship with God all the time, not just on Sunday. It's time to follow Jesus seven days a week."

Noted for the guitar-driven, hard-

listen to. We try to listen to ourselves a lot, to play stuff that we would like to hear."

Seven Day Jesus' "fun" music combines post-Seattle grunge with Eddie and the Cruisers working-class rock 'n' roll. McSweeney is also noted as having one of the most powerful voices in this year's crop of new bands. A visiting A&R guy from a competing label summed it up: "He's got songs and he's got a great set of pipes!"

back into the band and there's so much to it. Practicing, oh, man, just making sure you're good enough to play a show that people pay money to come and see. To me, that's the most important thing."

"But whether or not we play a great show," Sumpter adds, "if the message is there, God is going to use it. If there's a kid out there that needs to hear it, they'll look past the music." ●

THE SUPERTONES HAVE THAT rare opportunity to introduce the Christian community to a new kind of music and frankly, drummer Jason Carson is more than a little nervous.

"There's some pressure because I feel so responsible to the Lord," Carson says. "I want to show people that Christians can do 'ska' music, too."

The word, "ska," is guaranteed to garner a few confused looks, so maybe an explanation is in order. Actually, the Supertones are considered a "third wave" ska band—which means somewhere down the line there's been traditional ska and second wave ska. Carson explains that ska originally evolved from reggae with a "rock steady beat." Second wave ska included such bands as the Selectors, with a more up-tempo, two-tone version of the original ska.

Third wave ska takes the original elements of ska and adds punk influences. Bands like Operation Ivy and most notably, the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, fit into this category along with occasional entries from popular new bands such as No Doubt and Rancid. "It's aggressive. It's fun. It's danceable," Carson says.

For the Supertones, it was those elements of ska that hooked a band that had previously been a catchall for every musical style imaginable. Carson and lead singer Matt Motinsky's band, Saved, had been playing punk,

disco, rock, metal, speed, thrash, ballads and, as Carson admits, would probably have eventually delved into polka. Under the influence of Mortinsky, the band's resident ska expert, they transformed several songs into ska tunes before eventually emerging as the current outfit.

The Supertones now consist of Carson and Mortinsky, along with a bassist, guitarist, trumpet player and saxophone player. Carson says they would like to add another sax and a trombone to fill out the horn section. Nonetheless, the band's sound was good enough to earn them a record deal, making them the first Christian ska band with a nationally distributed album.

Already, the Supertones have received kudos from Christians who have waited patiently to hear Christian ska, but have also heard the murmuring of secular skeptics who consider the band nothing more than a slick rip-off.

"We've already heard it," Carson says. "But if we're for Jesus, persecution's going to come no matter what we do. All I can do is stand on the promise that I'm blessed if I'm persecuted and God's going to get the glory. That's exciting."

Carson hopes the Supertones will open the door for Christian ska bands to emerge all over the country, much like the



explosion of hard-core after Focused and The Crucified burst onto the scene a few years ago. Since Carson pulls double duty as the drummer for hard-core band, Unashamed, he knows well the impact his new band can potentially have.

"I'm excited about this because I know—whether we're God or not, whether people like us or not—there's going to be bands that start Christian ska because of our album coming out. It's amazing how many Christians are coming up to us these days and telling us, 'It's about time there's a ska band out there who stands up for God first.'" ●

IRONY IS SOMETHING WITH which the Gospel Gangstas are quite familiar. On the rugged streets of Los Angeles, they can relate to the sudden twists of fate that often result in matters of life or death.

"We've been on both ends of the gun," Mr. Solo says. "The gun where you shoot and the gun where you run."

It was just a few years ago when Solo and the other Gospel Gangstas, Chille' Chill and Tic Toc, were themselves hopeless gang members lost amid a world of drugs and violence. At any given moment, Solo and Chill might have found themselves in direct conflict with Tic Toc, who ran with a rival gang.

Now, the trio takes its message to the same gang-infested neighborhoods with a West Coast rap flavor that's turned the heads of secular radio in Los Angeles, not to mention rap music's current king-of-the-hill himself, Coolio.

Just after the release of sophomore project, *Do Or Die*, original member DJ Dove left the group for full-time work at his label, Holy Terra Records. Don't think for a moment that the Gangstas have been in some way

derailed from their mission. Solo likens Dove's departure to Moses' death and the transfer of Israelite leadership to Joshua.

"Men don't stop the show," he says. "If anything, the anointing has increased. Dove's still a homey. He's still down. It was a blessing having him from day one because he knew the industry going in. He helped us avoid some of the road blocks that he went through with the other groups he was involved with."

Dove was also instrumental in helping the group mature creatively. It was a solid church life, on the other hand, that has helped the trio develop a necessary spiritual maturity. After a couple of years proving themselves to the industry and the church alike, that maturity has come in handy on numerous occasions.

"We try not to offend anybody," Solo says. "We show respect. If someone doesn't want hats in their church, praise the Lord. It's not about my hat. It's about the ministry of Jesus Christ and I'll take my hat off. If they say no dancing, okay, praise the Lord; we're not gonna dance. We're gonna respect the house."

The Gangstas are currently on a tour of the Los Angeles County jail system and a lot

of the media attention has come their way for both the good deeds—not to mention the group's cutting edge music. The Gospel Gangstas are currently in the planning stages for a national rap tour and each member should be expected to release a solo album by year's end. Despite the wave of success that's carried them thus far, Solo is quick to put rap music in its spiritual perspective.

"Rap is just a tool for the Gospel Gangstas," Solo says. "Rap is just a platform for us to share what God has done for us and what he wants to do for everybody. We don't want to offend anybody; we just want them to accept Jesus Christ." ●

FOR YEARS, MARK ROBERTSON

was afraid of Mr. Rogers. "I thought he was kind of creepy," the bassist/singer/producer/songwriter recalls. "He was so unlike my dad, who's a very tough, blue collar, manly man. So to see Fred Rogers, who was more like my mom or something, kind of freaked me out."

Those feelings started to change as Robertson got older. So much so, in fact, that Robertson made Mr. Rogers the subject of the song "Every Word You Said," found on the This Train record, *You're Soaking In It*.

"What I fear with that song is that people don't get it," Robertson says. "I know people think the song is funny, and I guess it is. But to me it's not really a funny song ... the song is really about how painful it can be to grow up."

More things about This Train come from Robertson's childhood than songs about Mr. Rogers, such as the band's name: His was not a church-going family growing up, but his aunt would often drag him to Sunday services with her; his earliest memories of church is the congregation singing, "This train is bound for glory, this train..."

Years later, when Robertson began playing support in Christian rock bands like

Altar Boys, Allies, Brighton, the Stand and Rich Mullins' Ragamuffin Band, his dream was to front a band of his own and call it—you guessed it—This Train.

The band's debut, *You're Soaking In It*, is a collection of catchy, sometimes goofy, sometimes tender, smart rock songs. Conspicuously first on the track listing is a rave-up punkabilly cover of Amy Grant's "Baby Baby." Robertson says the band didn't really put a whole lot of effort into the arrangement: "If we worked on that song five minutes, I'd be surprised. I just kind of showed the band the progression I had in mind and called out chord changes until the song was done. It was one of those songs you can't get out of your head once you hear it. So, we thought, why not do it the way we'd like to do it?"

While on tour they actually ran into Amy Grant and her husband Gary Chapman.



"In Nashville, I went to dinner with some people a couple of hours before the gig and there was Amy and Gary. So, we gave them a copy of the record. I would love to know what she thinks. We never talked to Amy about it. But we talked to Gary and he said our version was way cooler."

BY DAY HE DELIVERS THE MAIL,

by night he throws down the beats. Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Nope. It's MC Peace586. He may not be your ideal of a superhero, but if you're looking for the real stuff in hip hop, than this is your man.

Peace586, who is one-half of Freedom of Soul, is excited to release his first solo album. While Freedom of Soul is still together, Peace586 hopes to show a different side of his talent with his solo work. "The thing I'm doing is just strictly hip-hop. This is just the beats and rhymes. It's more of what I want to do, I guess. To me it's more real."

With the release of *Risen Son*, Peace586 wants to reach the unsaved, describing his target audience as the non-Christian hip hop fan. "It's anybody that loves beats and rhymes. I feel like there's a lot of rappers out there in this Christian thing

for debate, what is beyond debate is the group's recent change in direction; one wonders if dc Talk's move away from rap will adversely affect the rap world in general and cause a decrease in visibility. "The fans they had, I think, weren't rap fans. I'm not trying to dis them, but these fans were little teenyboppers, little kids who were just into dc Talk and what they looked like and their stage show. They were cool for those little kids at the time. But the people who were into real hip hop at the time were the ones that were going to our shows."

Being the real thing is admirable, but it isn't always the most commercial route to take. "I work during the day," he admits. "Unfortunately, I don't have the fan support like dc Talk to where I can buy a home, drive a BMW and own my own recording studio." When he's not on stage, Peace586 drives a white government vehicle, wears a familiar blue uniform and sometimes even chases away angry dogs.

"Working for the United States Postal Service is a cool gig, you know. It pays the bills."

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"I DON'T WANT ANYONE TO

think reggae is a fad," vocalist Mark Mohr of Christafari says. "Reggae's been around since the '60s. Reggae originated rap and hip-hop and we know those styles aren't fads. We're the first Christian reggae band and we're here for the long haul."

Christafari hopes to solidify that

thought with the release of their third album, *Valley of Decision*. Whereas the group originally tried combining pop elements with reggae to win over newcomers, *Valley of Decision* takes the band's sound full force, blending roots reggae and modern dance-hall reggae.

"Our music is going to be foreign to a lot of Christians anyway, so we decided to just give them 100 percent unadulterated reggae," Mohr says. "This is the first album that's been completely Christafari. It didn't filter through a non-reggae listener's hands."

Christafari hardened their recent stylistic direction during the 46-city Reggae Sunsplash Tour, where the band opened for the largest touring festival in America. To have a

Christian band involved is amazing, when you consider the reggae culture's cult-like and anti-Christian message.

"Sure, we got flack. We got what I would consider major persecution from the entire Sunsplash group when it came to the issue Rastafari and our Christian beliefs. Reggae is very militant in its belief: If you stand against their god, you're going to die, and they'll personally try to do that themselves. We faced that on tour."

The band's busy schedule includes appearances at the Olympics in Atlanta, at Stone Mountain and at a block party by The Hard Rock Café. Look for them also at the Kansas City Reggae Festival with headliners Ziggy Marley and Bunny Wailer, not to mention two Bob Marley festivals in Louisiana.

Ultimately, Christafari hopes to lead the way for any Christian reggae bands to follow. "Our ministry has always been two-fold," Mohr says. "Our purpose is to evangelize the world and edify the church."

"We want to break both the Christian and secular genres and be 100 percent in both and not compromise or change the message for either."

michael
knott



Michael Knott's *fluid* is a raw, honest, and deeply personal work. It tells the story of Jenny May, the day she crashed her ex-boyfriend's classic Cadillac Fleetwood to get back at him for dumping her (reportedly a true story). The album chronicles her journey to faith while lying in a coma, near death, while the Devil tries to claim her soul. Knott manages a happy ending without resorting to pat answers or cheap sensationalism; think of it as Dante's *Inferno* as a rock opera or Milton's *Paradise Lost* with a '64 Caddy standing in for the apple as the metaphor for sin.

In the future, it's entirely possible Knott will be remembered exclusively for the Aunt Betty's, and that his 14 previous albums will continue to be ignored by the general public. The fortunate ones are those who've heard it all: Knott's mainstream work makes better sense in context with his Christian releases; after all, Jenny May could easily be a member of the Rogues Gallery found on *The Aunt Betty's*.

For Christian rock fans, Knott was an important artist who grappled honestly and insightfully with the tough questions of faith. *fluid* remains a fine example of rock music that speaks—no, screams—to the body, mind and soul.

—Brad Caviness

fluid ends Knott's Christian cycle on an up note, without forsaking the darker elements of his past best work. The record tells the story of Jenny May, the day she crashed her ex-boyfriend's classic Cadillac Fleetwood to get back at him for dumping her (reportedly a true story). The album chronicles her journey to faith while lying in a coma, near death, while the Devil tries to claim her soul. Knott manages a happy ending without resorting to pat answers or cheap sensationalism; think of it as Dante's *Inferno* as a rock opera or Milton's *Paradise Lost* with a '64 Caddy standing in for the apple as the metaphor for sin.

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—Brad Caviness

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The Choir

Like a welcome letter from an old friend, The Choir returns in strong form with *Free*

Flying Soul, a record that at once remembers the enduring charm of records like *Circle Slide* and *Wide-Eyed Wonder*, but also remembers the lessons of the angrier *Speckled Bird*, where the band struggled to reinvent themselves. Amidst the sonic dream-scape they've carved out—ambient waves of energy passing over fields of guitar harmonics—the real drawing card has always been Steve Hindalong's passionate, personal lyrics about faith, family and friends. In many ways, the questions and doubts plaguing the brilliant *Circle Slide* find their happy ending in *Free Flying Soul*—the tender longing of "If I Had a Yard" finds peace in the sweet "Yellow-Haired Monkeys"; the world-weary bitterness of the hymn "Restore My Soul" gives way to the healthier hymn "The Ocean," where the church is likened to an ocean, purified by the tears of God. However, this record is still tinged with honest regrets and apologies, such as the brilliantly unsettling "If You're Listening" or the tentative lullaby "The Chicken." The Choir has created a balanced work of art, showing that a Christian's life has both sunshine and rain. It

also seems they're no longer trying to find themselves; they seem content with who they are and where they are going. It is this confidence and mastery of their art that makes *Free Flying Soul* exactly the sort of record that lasts—we will be listening to this for decades.

—Chris Well



plankeye

Listening to the third release from Plankeye,

Commonwealth, it becomes strikingly obvious that there's nothing wrong with getting better. The band has come out of the garage with a cleaner, leaner sound, full of loud melody, without losing the energy and sonic irreverence that gave them their edge in the first place. Lyrically, the band is just as fearless; where "alternative" bands are often afraid to come right out and say anything, the songs on *Commonwealth* come right to the point: Many of the songs are hard rock prayers, directed toward Christ, full of hard-knocks wisdom and humility; other songs deal frankly with love and life, with the everyday occurrences that end up in your prayer life. Some people feel like music is somehow cooler when played badly and pointlessly; fortunately, bands like Plankeye believe in the importance of striving to make your art and your craft better. *Commonwealth* is a step forward, a rock-fest which pulls no punches.

—Scott W. Christopher



Tired of all that angst & roll that's been shoved upon you in the name of alternative music? Sick of all those dirges galore? Want to get happy feet? Need to dance? Then look no further than ska band The Supertones, just a bunch of God-loving guys from SoCal. You'll find traces of the original ska movement, such as the Skatalites from Jamaica in the '60s, plus a little of '80s bands Madness and The Specials, all mixed with a little Beastie Boys and a touch of punk. The songs move at a good clip, with riffing saxophone, chugging guitars, and rifling snare drums. The singing is sincere and positive, and the lyrics encourage the Christian listener. If, as some claim, The Supertones are the first Christian ska band, then the Christian ska movement (if, of course, there even is a Christian ska movement) is off to a skanking start.

—Dan MacIntosh

supertones

On the Blackball debut *Super Heavy Dreamscape*, songwriter Chris Scott seems preoccupied with the futility of life without God: Set to a sonic backdrop of crisp hard rock and bitter, muscular harmonies, songs like "Doesn't Matter" and "Wither" are almost rife with resignation (giving your life to Christ isn't just the best choice, he's saying, it's the only acceptable choice). Other songs, such as the ironic "Everything is Good" and the honest "Not The Way I Want It To Be," show how rarely we can trust other people. Some will remember Scott and guitarist David Bishop from the band Precious Death, a band that held certain promise: For a heavy metal band, they were forward thinking; however, they were still locked in the heavy metal shed. Well, sometimes, all it takes is a change of scenery. Scott and Bishop seem to have found just that; they still want to rock hard, but now it's easier for them to jettison the clichés of heavy metal. *Super Heavy Dreamscape* is exactly what the title implies: a loud presentation of the truth straight up—our collective, subconscious fears presented to us for inspection. Our need for salvation was never made more obvious. Dare you not to flinch.

—CsW

fourth estate



Although Fourth Estate has made a reputation in secular music circles for their progressive rock instrumentals, and although without any lyrics they don't reflect any Christian values, *per se*, the members of the group are Christians and have long wanted to share their music with their Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Where many rock instrumentals are loaded with pitfalls, Fourth Estate nimbly avoids the traps with ease and grace: They're accessible without being too tedious; they take chances without being just plain weird. As an introduction to new listeners, *See What I See* is a great primer.

—CsW



From the West Coast rap scene comes the CMC's, the latest discovery of the Gospel Gangstas. While the Gangstas' influence is present on the CMC's debut, *Everyday Death Sentence*, Gizmo and Miles, a pair of Samoan brothers, are given plenty of room to carve out their own identity—this is no carbon copy of the Gangstas' successful formula. The brothers, joined by assorted guests, including Solo, Chille' Chill and Tic-Toc, deal with some serious topics, including spiritual warfare, sin and Hell. This is a great debut for what promises to be the next breakthrough artist in Christian rap.

—Chad Bonham



blackball

the choir

The Sweet Nectar debut *Tired Face in Clown Paint* is the sort of hard rock album you'd play at a college art exhibit. Not that that's a bad thing, mind you; it's just that the guys in Sweet Nectar seem determined to make their record

SWEET NECTAR

as inaccessible as possible without making it just plain bad. Pop melodies are turned inside out, time signatures are dissected, and only most of the lyrics are in English. A song like "Flatland Diggs" proves they have the chops to sell out, but with disturbing lyrics that challenge the listener to think. A sweet and strange debut.

—Billy Holmes



PEACE586



Christian slant in a blur of emotion, all the while speaking with the authority

of a college professor. Song topics can range from the spiritual no-bones and confident "Lessons in Worship," to the deeply personal "Just a Hip-Hop Love Song," but mostly revolve around his street-smarts wisdom. The music's fresh hooks are the base for an equally refreshing experience in Christian music. Peace marks

the end of the Casio drum beats and the wanna-be sounds heard earlier in Christian hip-hop and rap. The music does not just offer a sound-alike alternative to "secular" selections —*The Risen Son* is a believable expression of an artist and a poet.

—J. Peter Roth

PAUL Q-PECK

Paul Q-Peck's theatrical panache and lyrical flourishes worked well with his old band One Bad Pig, when his talents were focused into a single musical pinpoint. However, his first solo record, *Touch The Ground*, suffers without direction: Lyrically, the record is quite imaginative; musically, Q-Peck can't decide if he wants

to be Peter Gabriel or Bob Carlisle—two of the songs even sound like leftovers from an unfinished Broadway musical. Paul, when you finish the musical, call me—it actually sounds like it would be pretty good.

—CsW



SOULFOOD 76



Soundtrack from Soulfood 76 is like a Billy Graham movie, populated by alienated youth, disaffected by society and the church, who seem to be without hope; we follow their individual tales of emptiness and regret to a soundtrack of solid, funk-heavy 70s hard rock, all the way up to the big finish, where they acknowledge their sin and need for forgiveness with "Trash" and then acknowledge the awe-

some love of God with "Purple." *Soundtrack* is actually a pretty clever piece of art, which needs the listener to sit down and pay attention. Like all great movies, all you need is some popcorn.

—CSW

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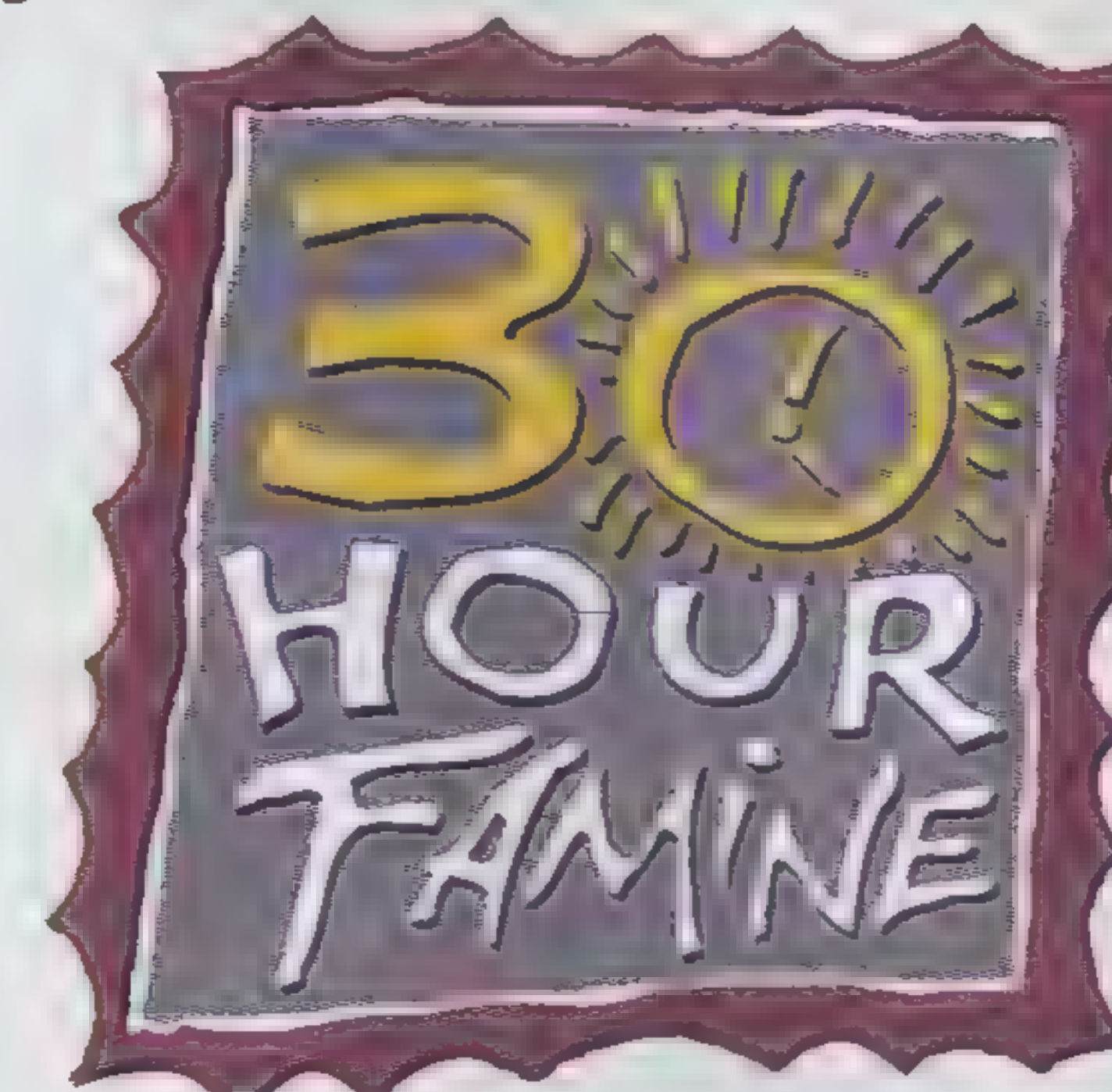
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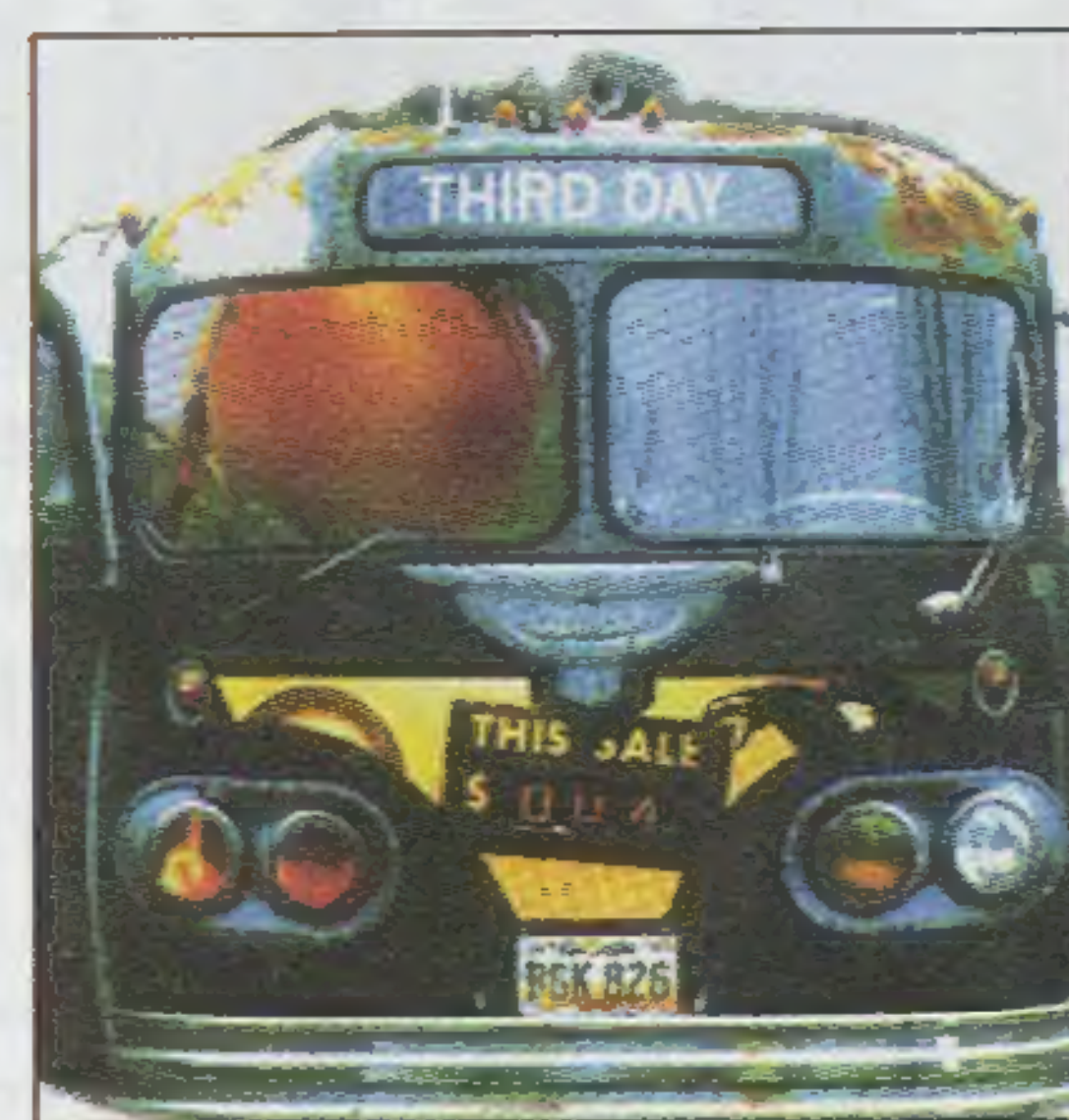
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third day

With likable, good ol' boy Georgia rock that crosses stylistic boundaries, and a lead singer with a rich, deep voice, it's inevitable that Third Day gets compared to Dave Matthews Band and Hootie and the Blowfish, among others. To be fair, Third Day is a hard working band with a great live presence, and their songs reflect a deep and passionate faith. Their label debut, originally released independently, has been remixed and remastered, and includes two new tracks.

—Val Meier



EVERYDAY LIFE

Some will hear subtle similarities (here and there) with Rage Against the Machine and Beastie Boys; others will simply realize how fresh and exciting Every Day Life can be, mixing punk-seasoned, metal-weary, razor-edged rock n' roll with some pretty fast raps and pungent social observations. *Disgruntled* is a manifesto of sorts, dissecting the sinful human condition in the shadows of Los Angeles, noting how quickly—without God—people degenerate into little more than rabid animals. Every Day Life have hit upon a formula that's certainly angry. And educational.

—Don Neely

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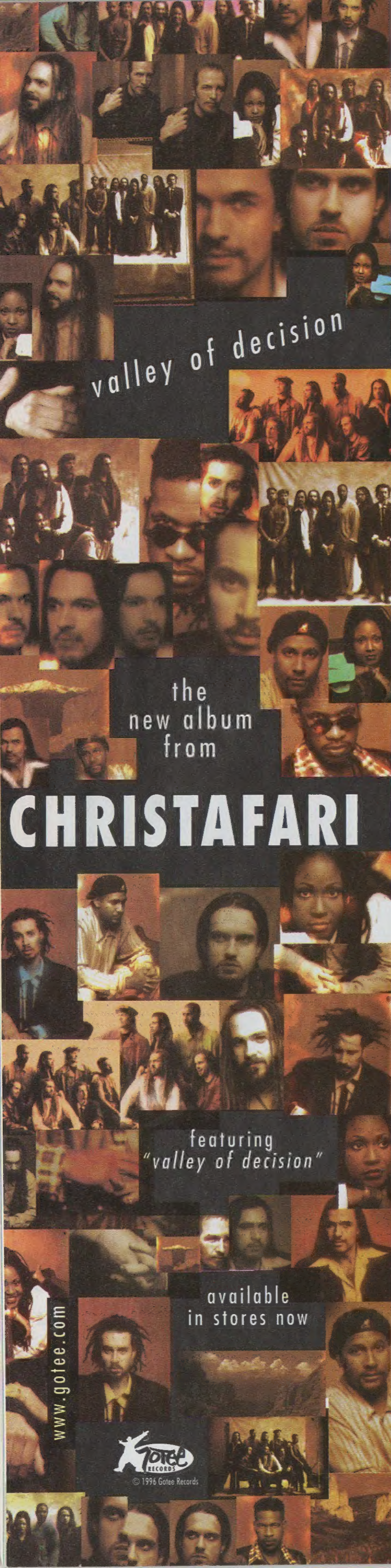


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Rock

- 1 THIS OLD MAN
Guardian/Myrrh
- 2 GOD IS NOT A SECRET
Newsboys/Star Song
- 3 RUST
Holy Soldier/ForeFront
- 4 LIKE IT, LOVE IT, NEED IT
DC Talk/ForeFront
- 5 PREACHER'S KID
Johnny Q. Public/Gotee
- 6 BELIEVE
Grammatrain/ForeFront
- 7 ROCKS IN YOUR HEAD
The 77's/Innocent Media
- 8 SURPRISED
Resurrection Band
Grrr/R.E.X.
- 9 COLOR BLIND
Michael Sweet/Benson
- 10 LIQUID
Jars of Clay/Essential
- 11 FEELS LIKE RAIN
Dime Store Prophets
Five Minute Walk
- 12 DEVIL AIN'T GOT NO HOLD
Three Crosses/Benson
- 13 YOU CAN'T TAKE ...
White Heart/Curb
- 14 BLEEDING
Sixpence None The Richer
R.E.X.
- 15 IN THE EVENT
Dogs of Peace/Sparrow

MODERN Rock

- 1 FEELS LIKE RAIN
Dime Store Prophets
Five Minute Walk
- 2 PREACHER'S KID
Johnny Q. Public/Gotee
- 3 STRENGTH
Seven Day Jesus
Five Minute Walk
- 4 MUDHOUSE
Black Eyed Scea
Five Minute Walk
- 5 CONFIDENCE MAN
The Throes/Reunion
- 6 DROUGHT
Common Children/Tattoo
- 7 CAROUSEL
Driver Eight/Tooth & Nail
- 8 IT'S A PERFECT DAY JEROME
Plankeye/Tooth & Nail
- 9 BLEEDING
Sixpence None The Richer
R.E.X.
- 10 MILK MONEY
Upside Down Room
Tooth & Nail
- 11 CAN I
Raspberry Jam/Metro One
- 12 ROCKS IN YOUR HEAD
The 77's/Innocent Media
- 13 YOU FOUND ME
MxPx/Tooth & Nail
- 14 MERCURY
Prayer Chain/Reunion
- 15 BELIEVE
Grammatrain/ForeFront

Loud

- 1 THE RED ROOF
Deliverance/Intense
- 2 YELLOW AND BLACK ATTACK
Leader Dogs for the Blind
R.E.X.
- 3 MY GOD
Crashdog/Grrr/R.E.X.
- 4 UNDERSTANDING
Overcome/Tooth & Nail
- 5 DIE TO THE FLESH
Rose/R.E.X.
- 6 TRIALS
Strongarm/Tooth & Nail
- 7 MEET US HERE
Unashamed/Tooth & Nail
- 8 MY PAL JUDAS
Siloam/Ocean
- 9 CIRCLE
Crux/Tooth & Nail
- 10 GARDEN
Rob Walker/Tooth & Nail

Club

- 1 MOMMA'S PRAYERS
E.T.W./ForeFront
- 2 END OF THE DAY
Echoing Green/Myx
- 3 THIS TIME
YWFC/Big Doggie
- 4 THINK ABOUT IT
Mike E/Big Doggie
- 5 O DOUBLE G'S GO ON
Gospel Gangstas/Holy Terra
- 6 SWEET SALVATION
World Wide Message Tribe
Warner Alliance
- 7 JUST TRYIN' TA STAY UP
Faze/Grapetree
- 8 LET'S GET IT STARTED
Bobby Ross Avila/Holy Terra
- 9 TAKE CONTROL
Code of Ethics/ForeFront
- 10 I GOT 'EM
Barry G/Grapetree

Charts reprinted courtesy of the Pure Rock Report, compiled from airplay reports of more than 80 radio stations and programs nationwide. The Pure Rock Report is a bi-weekly tip sheet for the Christian rock industry. Contact the PRR at (614) 272-6227 or on the World Wide Web at "http://users.aol.com/theprrr."

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music

In the fall of 1993, after the release of the video "Animal," Pearl Jam announced that they would stop doing videos.

The medium that pushed them over the edge into superstardom, including a nod for Best Video of 1992 for "Jeremy," would no longer be a part of the band's expression. They said they wanted to return to the basics—opting to project a style reminiscent of a time when vinyl, liner art and a listener's imagination were all that was available to the audience. A simpler time.

More than two years later the groaning muses of Eddie Vedder and his grungy companions remain a staple in the American music diet. Though they have taken some knocks, mostly because of their unsuccessful bout with corporate colossus Ticket Master and Vedder's tiring melancholy posturing, Pearl Jam still receives approving nods from critics' pens and fans' pocketbooks alike.

Despite Pearl Jam's stand, an appearance on MTV still remains as the pinnacle of most aspiring musicians. Many superstars do owe their success to the righteous Buzz Clip.

Especially, in the Christian music market, MTV remains a sacrosanct grail. The quest for this thing continues to be the dream of hundreds of Christian musicians. And though the canned glossy images from the likes of Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant put a glimmer in the eye of most of the church for a moment, the Christian scene has yet to grip the MTV audience the way Peter Gabriel, Madonna or Michael Jackson has.

Though efforts from Steve Taylor, Johnny Q. Public and Jars of Clay are laudable, the inside track and the almighty dollar seem illusive in the realization of audacious creativity, and ultimately, musical fame for many Christian artists in the 90s.

When listening to what glorious images LSU's "You're Everything" could conjure on my 19-inch screen at 2 a.m., or when picturing what an \$800,000 venture on the Prayer Chain's "Sky High" could bring to MTV, I must admit, I grow somewhat frustrated. After all, the genius of the music video convinced me that Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" was not only good music but a legendary classic that would forever live in western society.

But Gabriel's famous and brilliant images, it seems, are slowly becoming an exception on MTV. Instead of a golden musical chalice, most videos more closely resemble an item in Service Merchandise's discount showcase. One after another, hauntingly beautiful images are fractured by someone else's materialized interpretation. "All This Time" from Sting, "I Alone" from Live, "Molly" from Sponge, and the urban genius of countless rap groups reduced to silicone women and gaudy cars all leave my expectations plummeting. They all have the vague aura of a shoddy Saturday morning cartoon—only whetting the audience's appetite, reminding them their products are still only as far as the nearest Wal-Mart.


Don't get me wrong, the concept of the music video is good. However, its overall stature in relation to the world of art has slumped. The magic of visual music, which people were apprehensive to accept in 1940 with Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, is an immensely powerful experience.

Visual art is a wonderful medium. One only has to cite the immense success of the recent Monet exhibit at Chicago's Art Institute or list the classic novels which have recently been

made into major motion pictures to understand how powerful and appealing a visual experience can be. After all, it is easier to assess and discuss art that is laid in front of us.

But maybe the guys in Pearl Jam have a point. I can remember hot summer nights, in a home without MTV, listening to U2's *War*. The music was packed with angst and emotion in a sociopolitical message I so desperately strived to understand at the age of 13. Even now, when I listen to "Like A Song" and "40" I can still feel the spark of emotion that album produced. I have never seen the videos for either song (I'm not even sure they exist), and I don't care to, for that matter. No director could ever capture the discovery of ambition in an adolescent.

As well, Christian artists should not underestimate the power of their art, which they too often seem to measure by sales and market visibility.

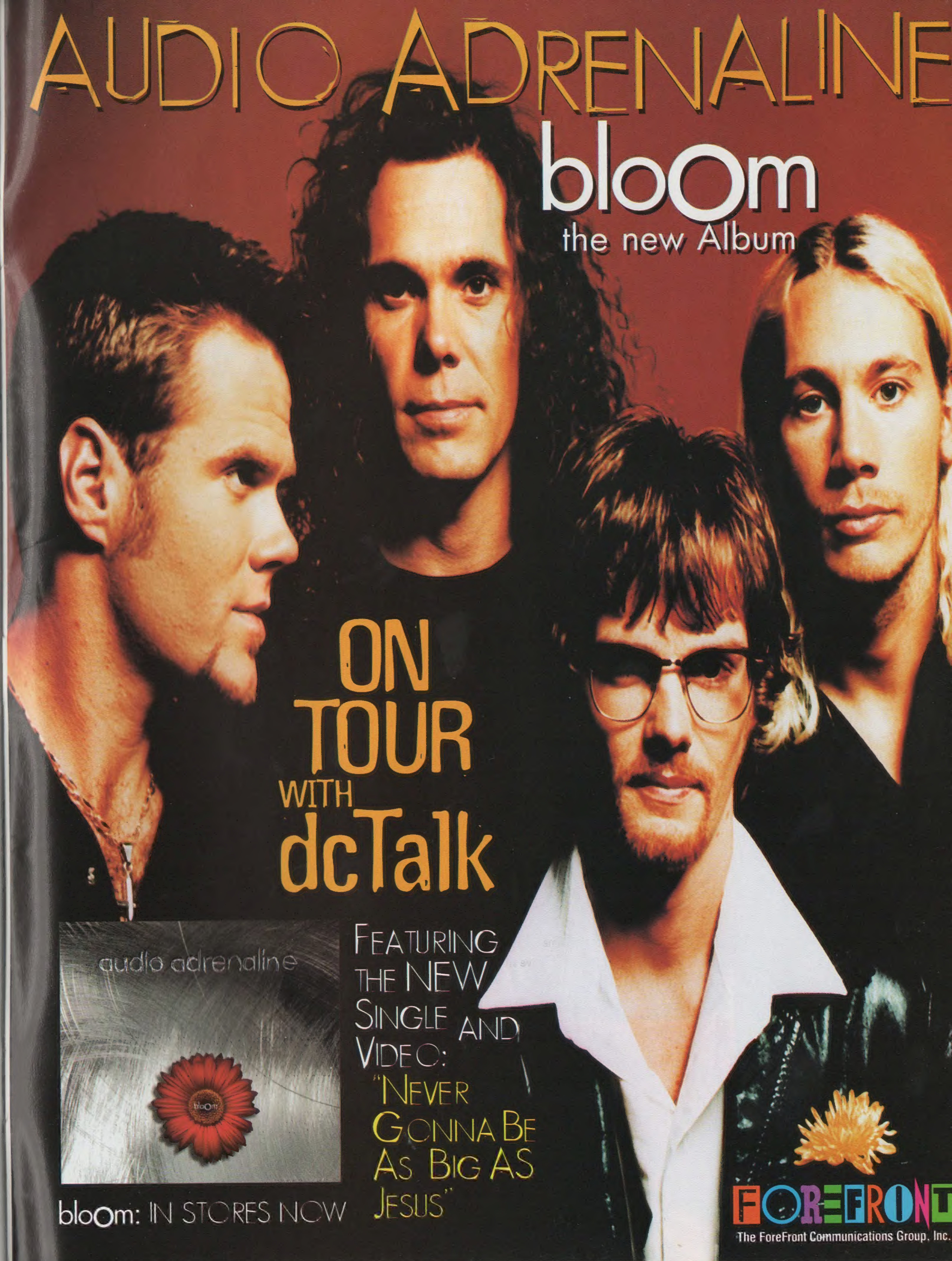
It is time we take a hard look at why visual art is chosen as a forum of expression. Do we make a video to give a new interpretation and offer a complementary perspective to a musical experience? Or is it simply a pacifier for the intellectually lazy? These are questions, it seems, we recently have forgotten—or maybe, never did—ask ourselves. 

by Peter Roth

Peter Roth

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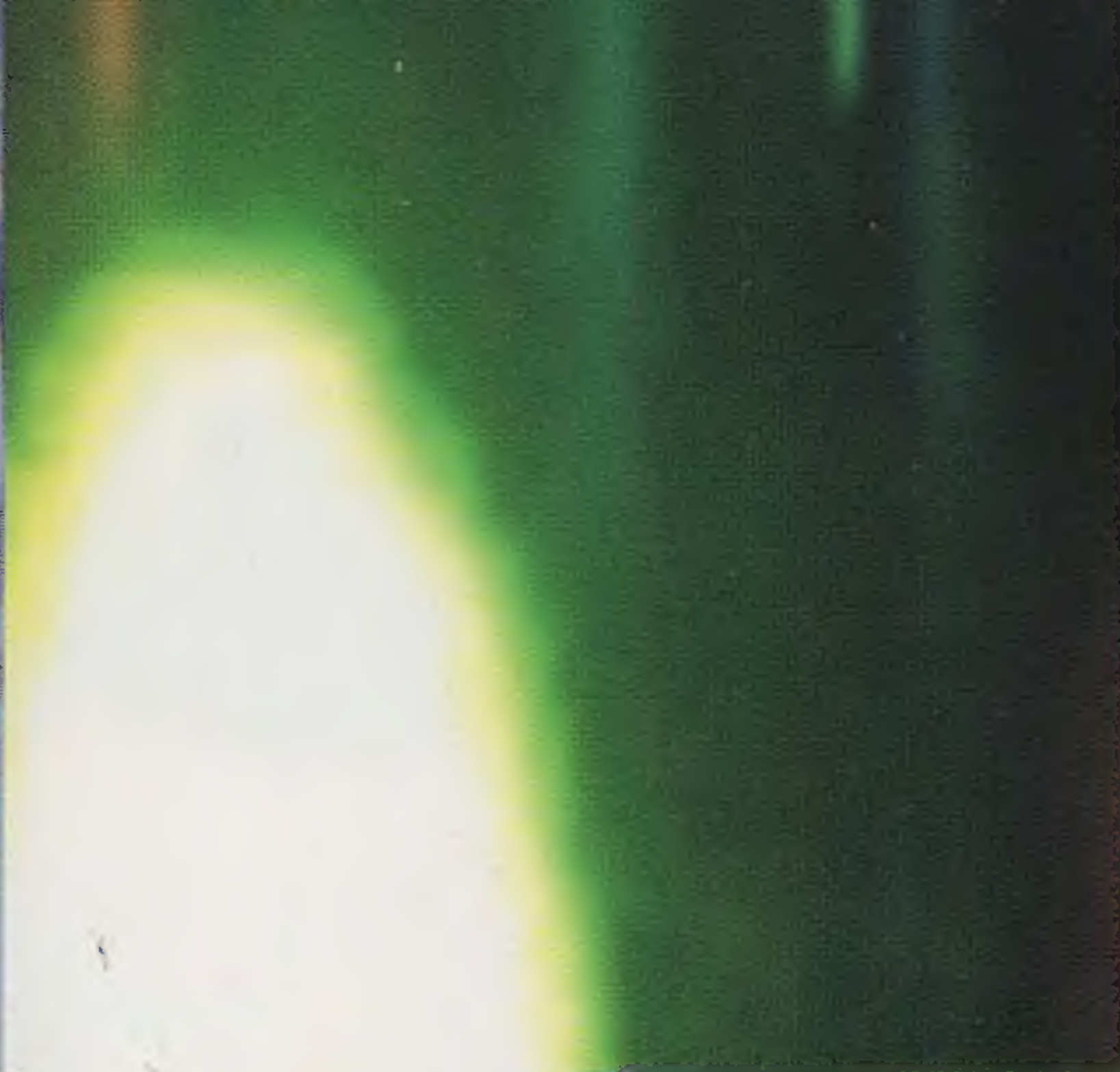


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- 4/27 Harrisburg, PA
- 4/28 Akron, OH
- 4/29 Columbus, OH
- 4/30 Louisville, KY

Poor Old Lu A Picture of the Eighth Wonder

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- 5/2 Grand Rapids, MI
- 5/3 Wheaton, IL
- 5/4 Minn, MN
- 5/6 Bismarck, ND
- 5/17 Santa Clara, CA (Great America)
- 5/18 LA, CA (Knott's Berry Farm)
- 5/19 Phoenix, AZ (w/ Newsboys)
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